

# Voices of Insight & Power

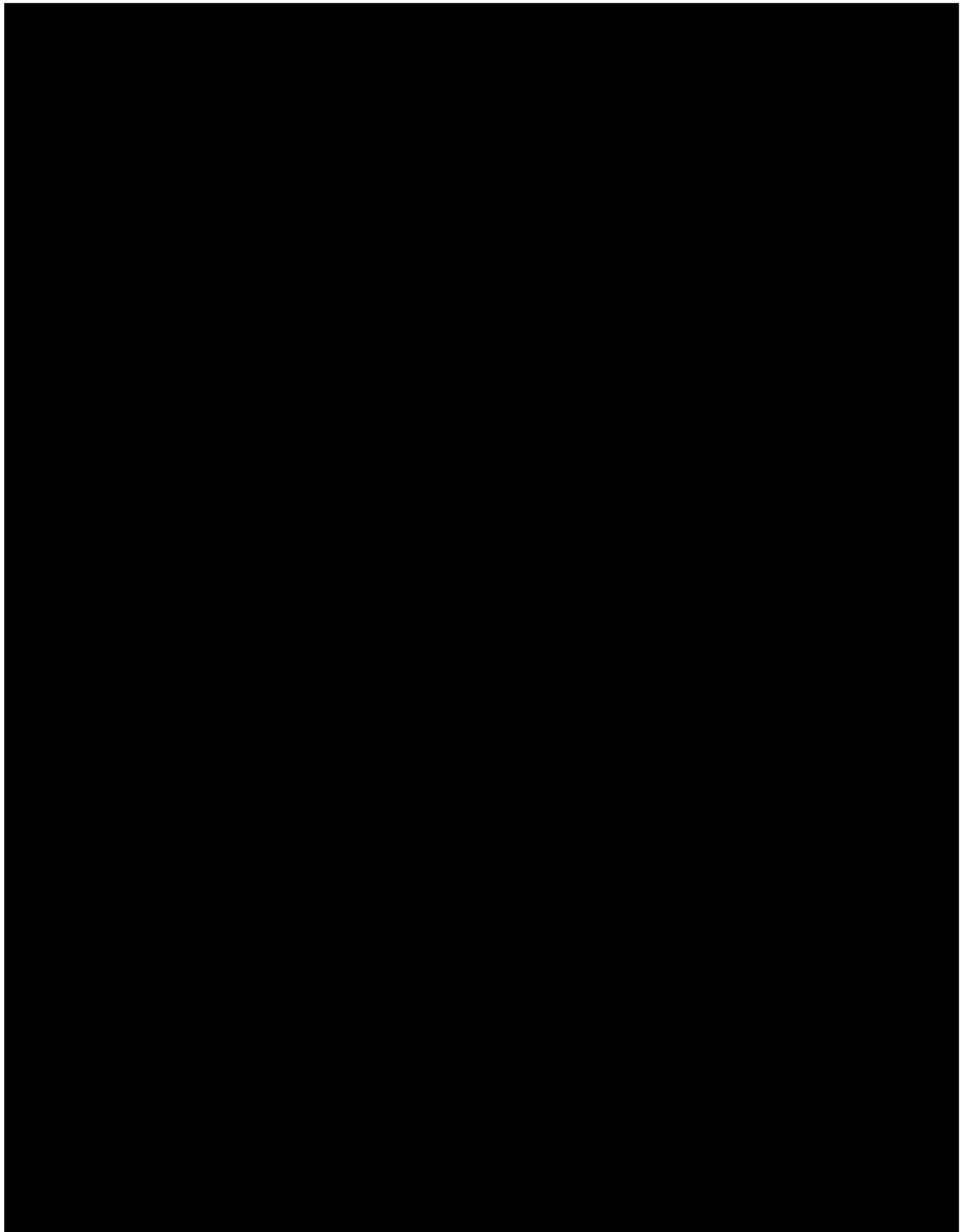
RECRUITING AND  
SUPPORTING  
MINORITY TEACHERS  
IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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ROCKEFELLER BROTHERS FUND



# Voices of **Insight & Power**

**RECRUITING AND SUPPORTING  
MINORITY TEACHERS  
IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

BY JOHN F. LAUERMAN

Rockefeller Brothers Fund  
Fellowships for Minority Students  
Entering the Teaching Profession

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# Foreword

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BY COLIN G. CAMPBELL, PRESIDENT  
ROCKEFELLER BROTHERS FUND

**T**he end of the 1980s was a time of transition in leadership of the board and staff of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (RBF). It was also a time when, with the strong encouragement of new board chairman David Rockefeller, Jr., the Fund developed plans to again support, after a ten-year hiatus, efforts to help reform and improve public education in the United States.

As a result of considerable discussion involving trustees, staff, and outside advisors, and guided throughout by Caroline Zinsser, first as education consultant and then as program officer for education, the Fund determined to focus its energies and resources on enhancing the quality

of professionals in the education field. The broad objective would be to help fund, recruit, train, and retain individuals of the highest caliber as public school teachers and administrators. This objective reflected a pervasive sense at the Fund that no other component of education reform was more important than improving the quality of teachers; and for that matter, no other education reform has any hope of real success without a major infusion of talented and committed classroom teachers.

The more specific strategies designed by the Fund to accomplish this objective were to increase the number of outstanding public-school teachers, particularly minority teachers, and to promote the development of the early childhood education profession. The former strategy was

selected because of the well-documented shortage of qualified classroom teachers and the growing challenge of student diversity in the public schools. The latter strategy reflected increased awareness among educators and developmental psychologists that the earliest learning experiences of children are vital to their later academic success, yet professional development opportunities for staff in this field are severely deficient.

A cornerstone of the Fund's education initiative was the Rockefeller Brothers Fund Fellowships for Minority Students Entering the Teaching Profession, which was launched in 1992. This program was intended to help close the huge and growing gap between the increasing size of minority enrollments in public schools and the much smaller proportion of minority teachers. It was to be a visible, nationwide effort to increase the number and quality of teachers of color by encouraging outstanding undergraduate students with strong liberal arts and sciences backgrounds to enter the profession; by acknowledging and helping them to address the financial obstacles so many of them face in completing undergraduate and graduate work; and by providing them with opportunities for mentoring by experienced professionals, as well as for a reinforcing association with a cohort of carefully selected peers from across the country. The Fellows would receive financial assistance and mentoring as they completed college, went through graduate school, and for the first three years of teaching.

Eighty of the 150 Fellows who have been recruited to date are currently teaching in public schools, and an additional nine are teaching in independent schools. Twelve Fellows have left the program. All the others are in education-related degree programs or "stopping out" according to approved plans for deferment. None of the Fellows, by the terms of their selection, had majored in education as undergraduates, and most had no plans for entering graduate schools of education until recruited into the RBF program.

As evidence of the program's ability to attract truly outstanding students and to sustain their interest in teaching, these statistics are very encouraging, particularly in light of the severe compensation constraints in most public education systems and the availability of more lucrative opportunities in other professions for such outstanding students. Moreover, as important as it is that a significant number of the Fellows end up in the classroom, it is also clear that those who ultimately choose another career path will have gained from the fellowship experience a far deeper understanding of the importance

of encouraging and supporting educational opportunity and quality. As opinion leaders in their chosen fields and in their communities, their voices can have an impact on public attitudes concerning vital education issues.

Those fortunate enough to have spent time with these young men and women at Fellows' meetings or to have encountered them in the classroom will recognize that they not only possess the qualities to be effective teachers but also, because of their innate talents and the benefits of their experiences as Fellows, are likely to be role models for their students and leaders among their peers. They may well be destined for careers as principals and superintendents with broad responsibilities for school functioning and reform. It is for these reasons, and to maintain a programmatic and professional link with the Fellows as they progress through their careers, that the Fund introduced an experimental leadership component to the program in 1997. To participate, a Fellow must have completed the master's degree and three years of teaching and, with RBF financial and logistical support, is expected to carry out a major project involving action for positive educational change.

In order to permit Fund staff to focus on the new leadership program and, more recently, to review the overall direction of the Fund's education grantmaking, no new students have been admitted to the fellowship program since 1997. It has become increasingly obvious to board members and the staff, however, that not only was the program a timely initiative, but also it sought to meet a need that has become increasingly urgent, given continuing changes in the demographics of the K-12 student population, as well as alarming projections of teacher shortages in the immediate future. Moreover, the important contributions of the program seem self-evident, as readers of the Fellows' profiles in this publication, on the pages that follow, and of Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot's thoughtful and moving introductory essay, must surely agree. The Fund has decided, therefore, to resume the fellowship program with the admission of a new class of Fellows in the spring of 2001.

This renewed commitment is made, realizing that the first and central contributor to the fellowship program's success since its inception will not be on hand to guide it. Caroline Zinsser has retired from the Fund after ten years of extraordinary service. Her tireless attention to every aspect of such a complex undertaking, and her close relationship with the Fellows, which can best be characterized as one of mutual respect and affection, will be a challenge to replicate. She has left a remarkable legacy. ■

# The Voices of Teachers

## Insight and Power

BY SARA LAWRENCE-LIGHTFOOT  
EMILY HARGROVES FISHER PROFESSOR  
OF EDUCATION, HARVARD UNIVERSITY



When I was a young girl, each morning before school, my grandmother used to comb my hair and make perfect braids. Fighting the tangles was made easier by the wonderful distraction of her teacher stories, stories so rich with drama and passion that even my child's ears knew that teaching was important and precious work. Before she moved north to live with my family, my maternal grandmother, Mary Elizabeth Morgan, had been the principal and head teacher at St. Mary's School in Vicksburg, Mississippi. The wife of an Episcopal priest, living in a respectable, middle-class, Negro neighborhood where "white folks were totally irrelevant," Mary Elizabeth founded a school for "colored" children who had no other place to go to be educated.



Her students came from miles around. They were the children of postal clerks and morticians, maids and poor tenant farmers. Mary Elizabeth loved teaching and she loved her students. Teaching was the place where she felt most powerful; it was her primary identity. She was a fierce, demanding pedagogue who demanded a lot from her students and even more from herself.

**M**rs. Morgan believed that every student could succeed and that it was her job to discover the best way to teach them. She was challenged by the misunderstandings, the confusions, and the moments of impasse that would often arise during a lesson. When Samuel Brown could not understand an algebraic principle, despite her best efforts at explanation, she would take the math book home at night, slip it under her pillow, and let her unconscious do the work. The next morning she would return to school feeling renewed and inspired. Maybe in her dreams she might discover a better way to teach and reach Samuel.

But Mary Elizabeth was not only determined to teach her students the three R's, she was also devoted to the broader purposes of education for the African-American community. Like her ancestors before her, she believed that "knowledge is power," that education would free her students from the bonds of ignorance and liberate them to become fully realized human beings. She wanted to train her students to be discerning and engaged citizens who would stand up for their rights and be catalysts for change. Her approach was both pragmatic and prophetic; guided by strategy, discipline, passion, and "the Spirit."

Almost a century later, we hear the insight and power of my grandmother's teaching in the voices of the eight teachers portrayed in this volume. They too are on a mission. They too see teaching and learning as both intellectual pursuit and community building, as both education and liberation. They too are haunted by the ghosts of their ancestors and have a special sense of responsibility to the communities they serve. And even though they are not working in a rigidly segregated society — like Mary Elizabeth — where the racial divide cast a harsh shadow on black children's hopes for education and enlightenment, they are teaching in settings where class inequities and racial discrimination still prevail and shape the engagement, achievement, and life chances of their students.

In this volume we meet one Vietnamese, one Navajo, three African-American, and three Latino/Latina teachers working in inner-city schools, affluent suburban schools,

and remote rural districts from Boston to Los Angeles. They are all young, well educated, and idealistic; determined to make a difference in the lives of their students; and committed to making an imprint on the schools and communities of which they are a part. They are also hard-working, often discouraged; struggling with the realities of entrenched bureaucracies, remote and static curricula, unprepared and undisciplined students, jaded colleagues, and their own self-doubt. Each day they have to negotiate the treacherous border between hopefulness and despair, optimism and cynicism. They are new teachers trying to develop their craft, discover a rhythm, and find their voices. They are teachers of color balancing the commitments of professionalism and cultural identity.

**T**he diversity of roots and journeys in these eight stories is itself inspiring. When she was a tiny girl, Cathy Nguyen and her family escaped the violence and brutality of the Vietnam War, traveling to safety in a small boat. Now she teaches elementary school near Los Angeles to children "who are living their own stories of survival." Her teaching is infused with a gratitude born out of her twin experiences of darkness and light, terror and triumph. She sees each day with her students as an opportunity for rescue, reinforcement, and reward. Lloyd Lee, a Navajo, teaches history and social studies at a boarding school managed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Fort Wingate, New Mexico. He wants his students to know their culture and their history, their origins and their customs; the authentic, complex narratives, not the scripts and lies that have distorted the truth for too many Native American young people. His pedagogy is a journey home, infused with cultural rituals. In an early morning ceremony, he "runs toward the rising sun and sprinkles corn pollen on his shoulders." And on Philadelphia's Main Line, Delvin Dinkins arrived as the only African-American academic teacher at Conestoga High School. His field is English literature, and his teaching is characterized by an exacting organization, a fierce discipline, and a restrained creativity. He believes he has found his rightful place teaching "future leaders." It is important, he thinks, to have his privileged white students experience a black teacher who holds high standards and insists that they meet them.

**D**espite the diversity among these young teachers, there are common themes that thread their way through these narratives. First, they are new teachers who see themselves as "learners." They are avid students of their intellectual disciplines, and they work to



shape a curriculum that is both rigorous and relevant to the lives of their students. They are also students of pedagogy, developing a repertoire of techniques and strategies for engaging and inspiring their students, experimenting and improvising even as they try to develop clear classroom rules and rituals, and searching for where to draw the line on issues of authority and discipline. Debby Saintil, who teaches history at an inner-city school in Boston, describes the frustration and difficulties of discovering her identity as a teacher, but she is clear that the goal is "academic discipline rather than behavioral discipline," and she knows that even through the hardest, most grueling days, she must always work to communicate expectation and respect to her students.

Not only do these teachers see themselves as active learners, many of them see teaching as a political activity. That is, they see their work in political context and want to use their voices to reshape curricular activities, institutional frameworks, and public policies. Their ambitions are linked to the special role they see for themselves as teachers of color; boundary sitters who feel accountable to the communities they serve. Mireya Jiménez, the daughter of immigrant parents from Mexico, is the language coordinator at an elementary school in Pomona, California. She is "the bridge connecting immigrant parents, their assimilating children, and a beleaguered institution." She remembers the alienation and embarrassment she experienced as a young child not being able to use her home language in school, yet never feeling as proficient

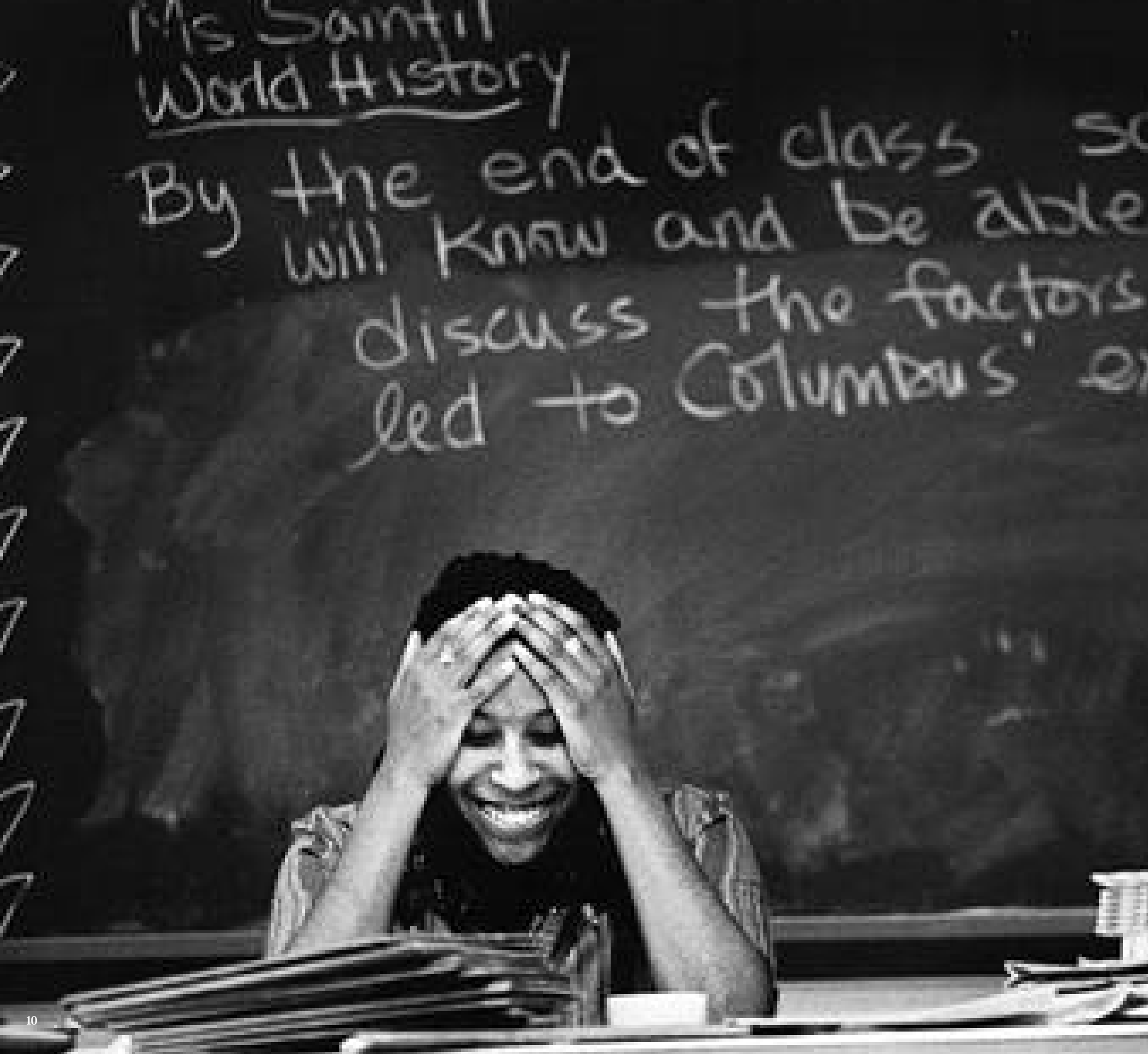
in English as her privileged Anglo classmates. As a teacher, she hopes that none of her Latino/Latina students will suffer the same humiliations. She has become a fierce advocate for bilingual programs, challenging California's Proposition 227 and railing against the prohibition that teachers must remain silent and not express their values and views. For Mireya, the personal, professional, and political dimensions of her work are joined. She believes, as do several of her colleagues in this volume, that teachers must participate in resisting policies that inhibit their work and disadvantage their students.

**F**inally, for all of these young teachers, teaching is their chosen vocation. They have all graduated from prestigious institutions. They are all lovers of learning, ambitious students who could have selected far more lucrative, high-status careers. Some of them even had to resist the dreams of, and pressures from, their parents and former teachers who wanted them to do "more with their lives." So they come to teaching with a fierce commitment to serve and a determination to make an imprint on their students. They are carrying on in the rich and demanding tradition of my grandmother. They too have wonderful and difficult stories to tell about their precious work. ■

*Fellows (from left) Justin Driver, Jennifer Cortez, Crissy Cáceres, Cathy Nguyen, and Delvin Dinkins at 1996 Rockefeller Brothers Fund board of trustees retreat.*







# Not for the Faint of Heart

## Debby Saintil

Jeremiah E. Burke High School » Boston, Massachusetts

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOANNE RATHE  
FOR *THE BOSTON GLOBE*

**J**EREMIAH E. BURKE HIGH SCHOOL, A formidable presence looming over Washington Street in the Dorchester section of Boston, is hardly a royal palace, but it's almost as well guarded. Pull open the heavy entrance door, walk past the metal detectors just inside, and you'll be greeted by a monitor who will ask to see your identification and tell you to sign in and to report to an administrative office on your right. Then climb a stairway where the light comes through wire-covered windows, and walk down some hallways past closed doors until you come to one classroom that's painted bright blue. Inside you'll find a young woman who would like to change everything you've seen on your way.

Debby Saintil is having a typical day of alternating frustration and reward. A teacher of world history, Saintil is conducting final exams for her junior-year students in the form of classroom presentations. Each student has been instructed to gather enough evidence on a revolutionary figure to put that person on trial. Today it's the Jamaican musician Bob Marley. The project is an ambitious one, and a few students have come to class unprepared.

*(Left) Debby Saintil smiles with relieved satisfaction after recording final grades for her high school students.*



"I wrote it on the board," Saintil says to one of them. "You didn't do the assignment and now you're taking it out on me." Some students look half asleep or just not interested. Others are quietly talking and laughing among themselves or poking fun at the presenters.

"Stop talking, man!" Saintil says sharply. "When a person is presenting, Luis, you need to be quiet and respect the presenter." She turns to the young girl standing at the head of the class. "And you, Tamara — the presenter should be making eye contact and speaking with passion. She should be provoking good questions."

Tamara resumes outlining the case against Bob Marley and his politically informed reggae music. The students start to pay attention, and Tamara's presentation gains momentum. Then unexpectedly, like a flame, the discussion leaps to life among a few students. Others join in the exchange, and the ones who had been having their own private conversations begin to listen closely. "Why did you say...?" "Marley meant that..." "I couldn't put him in jail for..." For at least a few moments the time-honored ghost of classical learning has been resurrected in this bare, high-ceilinged urban classroom.

None of that is accidental. It's the choreographed finale to a year of study that Saintil has worked for and anticipated. In her two years at "the Burke," as the school is known, she has continually experimented with seating arrangements, with assignments, with the curriculum, with source materials, and with her own teaching style to achieve this phenomenon: a classroom of high-school students intellectually engaged with academic subjects.

Bringing her students to the point where they can hold this level of discussion about abstract ideas — like revolution and justice — hasn't been easy. Until a few years ago the Burke was considered one of the most difficult schools in Boston for teachers to work in, and for a while it even lost its accreditation. In 1995 Steven Leonard took over as headmaster and began to make the environment safer and more supportive. But even he acknowledges that working at the Burke is not for the faint of heart.

"No matter how good you are, no matter how well prepared you are," says Leonard, "if you're putting yourself

into this job and doing it right, sooner or later you're going to break down crying. If it doesn't hit you, if it doesn't take absolutely everything out of you, you don't understand the job. I haven't seen an education course yet that teaches how big a heart you need to work here."

Leonard made it a priority for the Burke to have the highest percentage of minority teachers of any Boston high school. In Debby Saintil he found a young woman with the background and attitude to be a role model for high-school students in Dorchester. Saintil was born in Brooklyn in 1974, but when she was still an infant her mother took the family back to her native Haiti. They returned in 1979 and settled in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where Saintil attended parochial and public schools until the sixth grade. At that point her mother, who was a teacher, discovered that she could obtain enough financial assistance to send her daughters to Shady Hill, a prestigious private school not far from home.

Saintil was no newcomer to political discussion and debate — it was part of the everyday atmosphere in her own community. Many of her parents' friends were refugees from "Papa Doc" Duvalier's violent Haitian regime. When her mother took part in marches protesting the United States government's support of Duvalier, Saintil would go along. Backyard barbecues were often the scene of heated political discussions. With that background, she fit right into the heady atmosphere at Shady Hill, which she remembers as "the most challenging educational experience of my life" — a life that now also includes college at Wellesley and graduate school at Harvard. Debate and participation were the currency of the classroom, and Saintil grew more and more excited about what education could be.

After Shady Hill she attended Milton Academy, a private boarding school 12 miles from Cambridge. Her family was

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*Saintil's days often alternate between frustration and reward. She leans thoughtfully against her desk (left); enters her classroom (above left); congratulates a student on her success (center); and demonstrates meditation posture for a class on Buddhism.*

uncomfortable with the idea of her living away from home, but Saintil saw it as a time to affirm her self-determination and discipline and also to explore the school's extracurricular activities, such as theater, which she pursued with enthusiasm. It was at Milton that she began to develop a vision of how a school's environment could foster the kind of intellectual exchange she hoped for. Everything finally came together when she got to Wellesley, where she decided to become a teacher. From there she went on to a year of study at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and then became a teacher at Burke High School.

Most of her students at the Burke come from low-income families. Education isn't a priority for them, and only a small percentage will go on to college. But Saintil thinks that situation can change. One of the first steps to a better learning environment, she believes, is to create a learning space that communicates respect for the students and higher expectations for what they can achieve. "You can't take down the metal detectors — that's reality," she concedes. "But there are many things you *can* do." She points to the lunchroom, where trash barrels have been placed at the end of every table. This is meant to encourage students to dispose of their lunch bags and soda cans, but Saintil thinks it's merely unsightly.

"What kind of message does that send?" she asks. "We've got to make this into a place where people are respected. We need to get the students to take ownership of the school — to increase their sense of responsibility for their own learning and development. They should be thinking about how their own decisions may or may not make the place conducive to learning. We've also got to change our expectations for student behavior. I would concentrate on academic discipline, not behavioral discipline, because if you're taking care of academics there's no time to 'chill' or to get high in the restroom. I would have zero tolerance for people who aren't committed to learning at some level."

To Debby Saintil, education is a gift, not something to be taken for granted. When she was young her mother often told her, "I have nothing to give you but an education."

"That's where the money went," Saintil says. "I've always had the sense that education is your ticket to make yourself. Your financial well-being is important, but education is not about increasing your buying power. It's not a ticket to a house in the suburbs or a car. It's something to be invested in the community as a whole."

This is one of the hardest lessons Saintil has tried to impart to her students. Faced with so many economic and social challenges, they do not always understand the value of a conversation about ideas. But Saintil is intent on proving to them that community and education can be more valuable than jewelry or a car — and that a place to learn, even if it's an old school building in one of the poorest sections of Boston, can be more valuable than a palace. ■



(Above) Saintil and a fellow teacher, standing backstage, enjoy their students' talent show.

(Far left) At their Cambridge home, family members join hands to say grace. Saintil's mother, stepfather, and aunt are all teachers.

(Left) In the teachers' room, Saintil checks attendance printout against her class list.

**"I**nitially, my interest in the Rockefeller Brothers Fund fellowship was primarily based on the financial reward. I had no doubt in my mind that I was committed to preparing myself to be an effective educational leader. Thus, I was certain that acceptance or denial into the program would by no means affect my long-term goal. However, after the first August conference, the fellowship really began to take new meaning. I was introduced to a diverse group of educators from around the nation. I met people who shared the same commitment as I have toward the education of black and Latino students. I met people who unapologetically laughed and cried as they recounted their experiences working with youth of color. The fellowship has meant more to me than a scholarship to defray the cost of my graduate studies. It has connected me to a community of people who are driven by their hearts to make positive steps toward enforcing justice in all our communities. It has dignified my commitment to education and social justice. I thank the Fund a thousand times for this opportunity. It has had tremendous impact on my social and professional life. ”





# Swimming in a New Language

Carmen De La Cruz

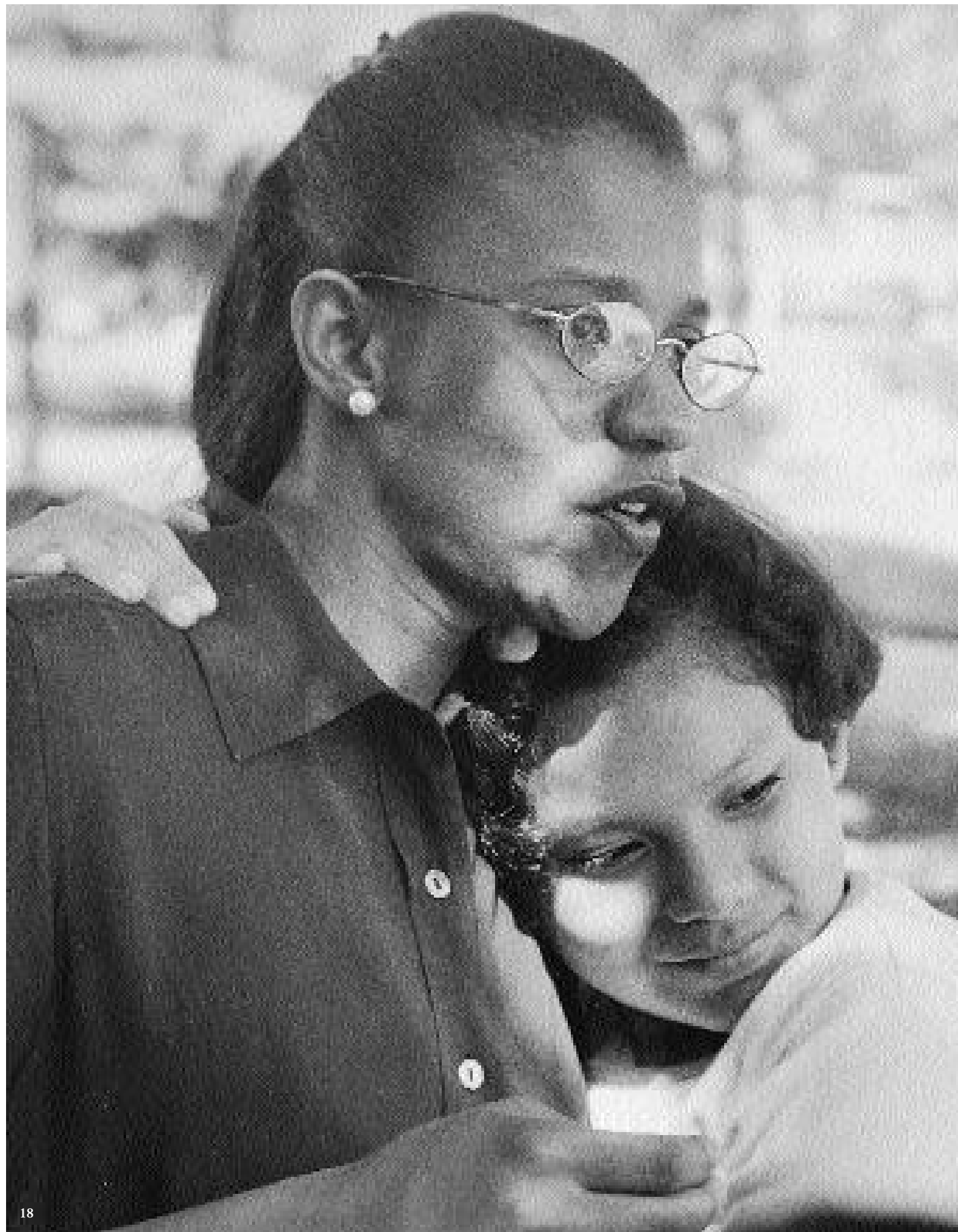
Francis Scott Key Elementary School » Arlington, Virginia

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MOLLY ROBERTS

**W**HEN SHE WAS TWELVE YEARS OLD, Carmen De La Cruz found what it was like to be pushed into the deep water of a new language and ordered to swim. That was her first year in Brooklyn, where her parents had brought her, along with three sisters and two brothers, from the Dominican Republic to escape a corrupt and punitive regime. She remembers entering school with absolutely no English; she understood almost nothing her teachers were saying. “I felt like I was a dummy,” De La Cruz recalls ruefully. “It was a tough time for me. I wouldn’t say anything.”

That was what language immersion once was for schoolchildren who had come to America from another country – a fall from a cliff of familiarity into the ice-cold water of the unknown. Each day was like a ride down a rapids. There was little to hang on to – just a few words picked up here and there that gradually became a vocabulary, then a rudimentary grammar, and finally a lifeline of written and spoken English.

*(Left) Carmen De La Cruz teaches fifth graders math and reading in Spanish.*



Today De La Cruz is a third-grade teacher at Francis Scott Key Elementary School in Arlington, Virginia, which has a large number of Hispanic students. She teaches in a new kind of immersion program that has eliminated most of the terrors from the process that humiliated her as a child newly arrived in America herself. Sitting in a child-sized chair, De La Cruz, now in her fifth year at Key School, reads to her students from a Spanish story-book. A casual observer would never suspect that, although almost half the students come from Spanish-speaking families, there are just as many who speak only English at home. But right now they are all Spanish speakers.

The class will spend the morning with De La Cruz, learning reading and math in Spanish. Then, halfway through the day, they will switch places with the third-grade class across the hall and take social studies and composition in English. Under this immersion program, students begin when they are in kindergarten, learning half their subjects in Spanish, the other half in English. Like the buddy system that children use to protect each other at camp, the program pairs Latino children with Anglo children. "They form a bond," says De La Cruz. "They're each immersed in their secondary language every day, so there's always something to exchange. Every child has a language that the other needs."

The program makes a virtue of diversity. Students of all ethnic backgrounds realize that they bring something unique and original to the schoolroom every day — their own language and culture. There's no sense of embarrassment among native English speakers when they answer questions in Spanish, or vice-versa. "How do you spell 'familia'?" they ask, working together on a writing project in which they are asked to describe themselves in a few words. "How do you say 'sports'?"

"I had one student, a girl, who was very good in Spanish," says De La Cruz. "The other kids always looked to her when there was a vocabulary question in my class, and that gave her a lot of recognition. When she went over to the English class she felt like she had to maintain her status there, too, so she worked extra hard to keep on top of things on the English side."

Far from presenting an obstacle to learning, speaking a foreign language at Key School confers status. Students begin to recognize language as a facilitator and as a source of power. "I really see two dimensions to what the program does for students," says assistant principal Evelyn Fernandez. "One is the personal dimension. Later on in life, many of these students will apply their second

language to their searches for jobs and other opportunities. But I also see a global dimension — one where children learn to be members of a diverse society and to look at things from different perspectives, because they learn about different cultures and use that knowledge here in school every day."

This encouraging environment was something that De La Cruz could only dream about when she was a student. Most of her teachers simply ignored her struggles as she fought her way through classes. She fell farther and farther behind, and she dreamed of going back to the Dominican Republic, where she had been an excellent student and had



felt free to live her own life. In Brooklyn her father would creep along behind Carmen and her sisters in his car every morning to make sure no evil befell them on their way to school. At night the girls were expected to come straight home, help around the house, and stay out of trouble.

But there was one ray of hope. One of Carmen's teachers recognized the problems she was having with the language. Mr. Scott was Puerto Rican, and he allowed Carmen to turn in some of the more complicated assignments in Spanish. For the first time she felt free of the stigma of inferiority. Today those experiences help her to empathize as a teacher with students who, like her younger self, face difficult situations beyond their control.

"A couple of years ago," recalls De La Cruz's team-teaching partner, Ellen Bretz, "the mother of one of our students was sent to jail. Carmen went to the sentencing with a few other teachers to plead for leniency, because she could see the trouble the children would have. She was the only teacher who visited the mother while she was in prison, and often she also took the children out to the movies and to McDonald's. An aunt was caring for the children, but, if it had come to that, Carmen would have taken them in herself. When the mother was released a few months later she came straight to the school to see her children and Carmen."

(Left) At class pizza party, Stephanie Teran gives De La Cruz a hug.

(Above, left and right) She works with parents in an evening workshop to explain in Spanish the school's curriculum, and (above center) leads students from her mobile classroom to the library.



**T**hanks to the support the Fund gave me, I was able to complete a dream. I was able to afford graduate school and to be selective in choosing where I wanted to go. Through the fellowship program I've met wonderful, inspiring people. It has helped me to relax financially since, thanks to the program, I'm done with the student loan payments. As a teacher, one of my greatest challenges was involving the Latino parents in their children's education, but with a grant that I received from the Fund's leadership program, I was helped to plan and implement a program to improve their participation. The parents named the program 'Gemini' and all of us – parents, teachers, and students – met once a week. I hope that one day I, Carmen De La Cruz, can repay the Rockefeller Brothers Fund for giving me the opportunity of my life. As a teacher I'm doing all I can to make the Fund proud. ”



**M**aking children feel welcome and free to learn is Carmen's mission and specialty. Some of her students are so happy in her immersion program that their parents use the threat of an English-only school to make them behave. In today's math class she focuses on individual students as each of them tells a story about *líneas paralelas*. It takes an outsider a few minutes to realize that, in this American school, children are learning math in a language that isn't English. What could be more stimulating to a young mind than to be learning geometrical concepts, with the support of an understanding teacher and fluent classmates, in a new vocabulary and grammar?

De La Cruz and Ellen Bretz often try to coordinate their class content in ways that allow students to encounter the same concepts and vocabulary in both English and Spanish. A lesson conducted in English about the parts of a flower might be followed by a reading session about flowers conducted in Spanish. "That's an integral part of our team-teaching approach," Bretz says. "We try not to force things that don't fit – you can't make nouns and pronouns jump up and down in a math lesson. But there's a natural synergy between us and our ideas that plays out in the way we design our coursework."

Their method also has a way of encouraging students to help each other. De La Cruz points to a learning-disabled, Spanish-speaking student who often has difficulties with his math lessons. But today he seems to be getting the hang of what parallel lines are and what they imply. The other students cheer after he gives a short but correct answer to one of De La Cruz's questions. The pride that she takes in her students' attitude shows on her face.

Last year Key School was one of only three schools in Virginia that scored high enough on performance tests to win state accreditation. De La Cruz gives the immersion program some credit for that. The students excel, she believes, because the school gives all its students the opportunity not only to swim but to enjoy immersion-style learning.

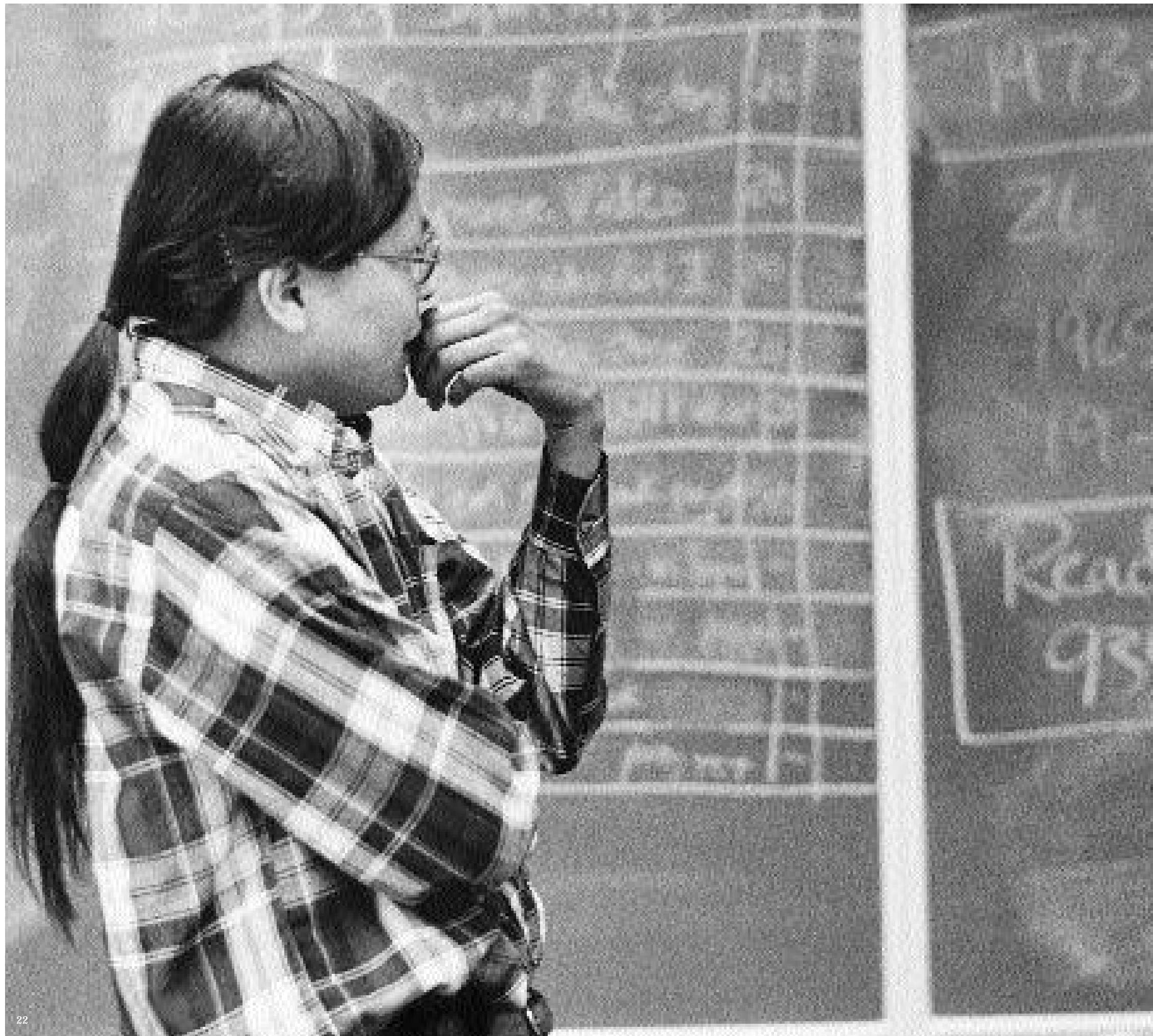
"I'm a total believer in the immersion program," she says. "I only have to think back to when I was in sixth grade. There was one room where I could be successful because I had an understanding teacher – it was O.K. to be who I was. But when I went to the other rooms it wasn't O.K. to be me – I wasn't respected for who I was. That's what made me so militant and what has since made me a role model to my students. I can look at them and say, 'I've been there.'" ■

(Above) De La Cruz encourages her students to support each other in learning a new language.

At outdoor ceremony (left) she congratulates Jessica Lopez and awards a certificate for class participation.







# A New Kind of Warrior

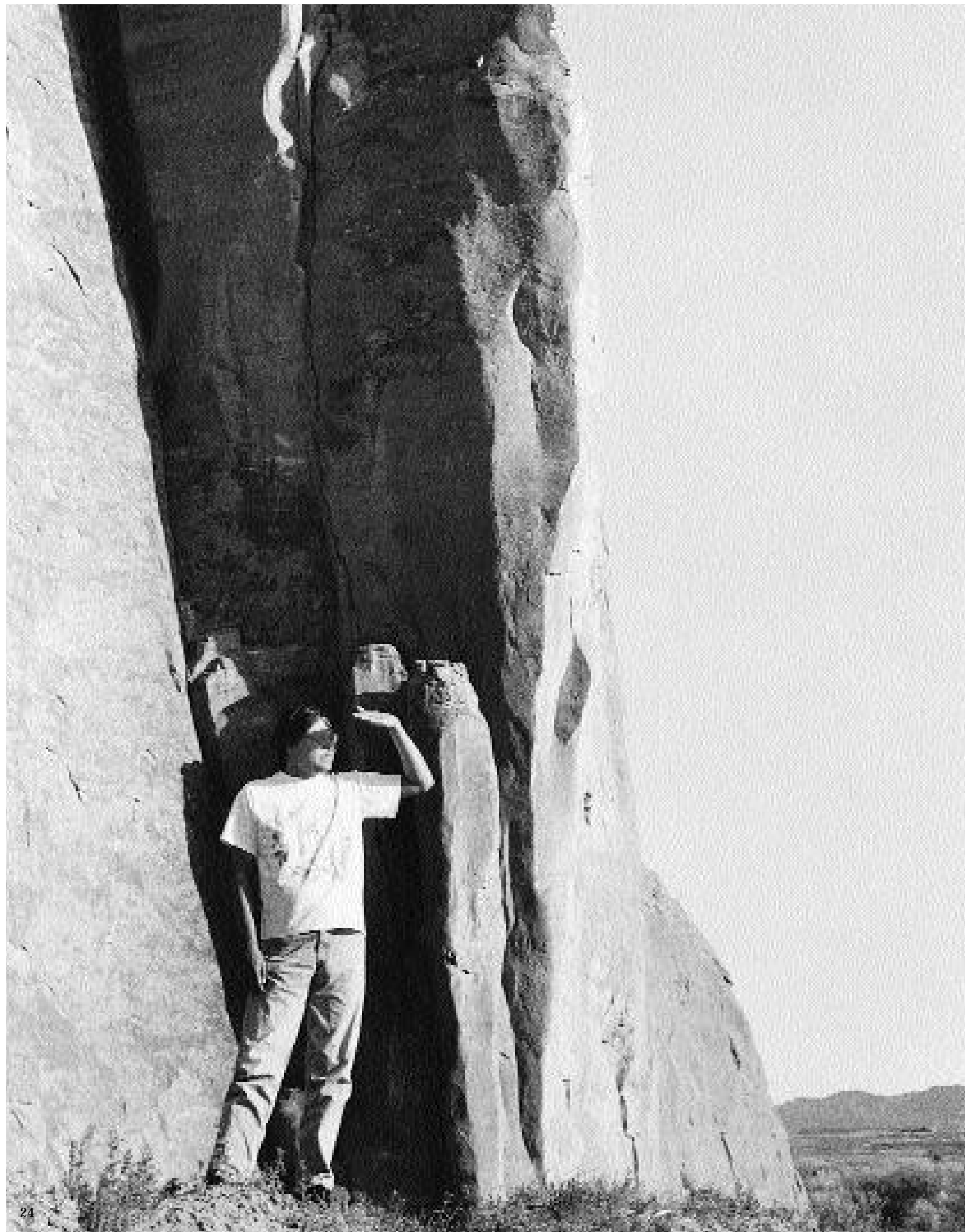
## Lloyd Lee

Wingate High School » Fort Wingate, New Mexico

PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEVE NORTHUP

**B**Y THE TIME THEBELL CALLS STUDENTS to class at 8:10 A.M., the early summer sun is already high in the sky over Fort Wingate, New Mexico. About 20 miles west of the Continental Divide and ten miles east of Gallup, Fort Wingate lies just south of an enormous reservation, the size of West Virginia, that is home to 180,000 Native Americans. Navajo, Hopi, and Zuni students come from many parts of the country to study at Wingate High School, a boarding school managed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Many come to escape poverty, which is rampant in their communities; some come to prepare to enter the armed forces; and a few hope to go on to college. Thanks to Lloyd Lee, a twenty-seven-year-old Navajo who teaches history and social studies at the high school, many of those students get more than they expected. They learn what it means to be a Native American.

*(Left) Lloyd Lee introduces Navajo heritage into his high school history classes.*



(Left) Lee views sunset from Red Rock State Park, near Gallup.

(Right) In the library, he helps Vanessa Barber with geography assignment.



On this particular morning it's almost the end of the 1998 school year, and Lee is reviewing the semester's syllabus, using a format he particularly enjoys — the answer-and-question format of the television program "Jeopardy." The students assemble into teams of three and four, giving themselves names like "Flip Mo' Squad" and "Fairy Sweat" that reflect the pervasiveness of urban American hip-hop culture. Now it's time to play. Lee states the answer, and his students race to supply the correct question.

"This was the only piece of land ever given back to Native Americans by the federal government, for 20 points," says Lee. He leans his six-foot, rail-thin frame against a wooden easel at the front of the class, pushes his oval-framed glasses to the bridge of his nose, and looks around the room, a foot-long ponytail swaying behind him. A few hands go up, and Lee chooses the first one.

"What is Blue Lake?" Terry answers correctly. He is allowed to choose the next category. "Native American Timeline, for 40," he says.

"In this year," Lee reads from a card, "Native Americans received the right to vote in New Mexico."

"What happened in 1962?" Shockingly, the answer is correct — Native Americans didn't vote in New Mexico until the 1960s. It is Lee's hope to remove harsh facts like these from the realm of trivia and to establish them as part of every Native American student's personal history, just as

every schoolchild knows the date 1492. "There were lots of things that were done to Indian people over the years," Lee says later, "and there were a lot I didn't know about myself until I went to college. Now I want to make sure our people don't forget those things."

Lee sees his path as one that leads not only towards reminding young Native Americans of their history, but rekindling in them his own sense of what it means to be Navajo, or Hopi, or Zuni, or Pueblo. An "A" student in high school, Lee won a scholarship to study at Dartmouth College, which has a high proportion of Native American students. Although he was thousands of miles from his family, it was at Dartmouth that he discovered his historical and cultural roots among other educated Native Americans. He became an activist, and while other Dartmouth students campaigned to raise awareness of institutionalized discrimination in South Africa, Lee and his fellow Native American students urged the college to divest itself of holdings in utility companies that proposed to take land from the Cree tribe to build a power dam.

After college Lee resolved to return to New Mexico and teach on the Navajo Reservation, about two hours from his parents' home in Albuquerque. This is the land the Navajo call *Dinetah*, home of their people the *Diné*. Turn on the radio and you'll hear station KGAK ("All Navajo, all the time"), where *Diné*-speaking disk jockeys play the high-



(Left) Lee plays baseball in game of faculty against the girl students.

pitched, ghostly, sonorous, ceremonial songs of the Navajo people — songs about the same things we hear about on English-speaking radio stations, like love, and God, and rain. Pull off on any side road and you'll see the characters and landscape of the *Diné* religion: rabbits and eagles, sagebrush and juniper. Navajo mythology says that their people rose through four worlds to arrive at this region roughly defined by four sacred mountains: *Sisnaajini*, *Tsoodzil*, *Dibé nitsaa*, and *Dook'oo' oos lííd*. More than a holy land, this is *the* place where Navajos live.

Considering that almost everything the Navajo hold sacred has been taken from them at some time, it's a miracle that they still have *Dinetah*. A stone, horseshoe-shaped memorial just southwest of the town of Fort Wingate commemorates the site of one of many treaties that were later broken by the United States Government. The Bureau of Indian Affairs has its own controversial past. Native Americans say that as recently as 20 years ago they were punished and even beaten for speaking their native language in government-run schools. Lee's own father and mother, now a welder and a kitchen worker in Albuquerque, attended those same schools.

Since returning to the reservation, Lee has tried to deepen his own cultural identity, as well as that of his students. He often performs an early-morning ceremony in which he runs toward the rising sun and sprinkles corn pollen on his shoulders. In the summer of 1998, Lee underwent the Enemy Way ceremony, which is traditionally performed after a young man has engaged in his first tribal raid. Dressed in Navajo wool, buckskin, and silver jewelry, a band around his head and his long hair tied in a *tsaye*, or bun, Lee participated in four days of sacred Navajo singing and dancing that culminated in his body being painted black with charcoal. The ceremony was performed by Lee's mother's family. Navajo regard their mothers' families as their own and will refer to their mother's nieces and nephews as their sisters and brothers.

"The ceremony felt good," says Lee. "I enjoyed the dancing and singing, and it clarified many things I had been going through at school and at work. Unfortunately, not many Navajo kids get to experience these rites any more. The ceremonies were passed down from one generation to the next, but today so many medicine men have died out that many of our rituals are lost forever."

Not all of Lee's students respond to his message about

traditional tribal ways and culture. Some are already caught up in popular American television and music. Others simply aren't ready to absorb the full scope of their cultural heritage or the enormity of what was done to their people. But many of them appreciate what Lee is trying to teach them about Native American history. "You learn about your culture — what your parents and grandparents have gone through," says Michelle, a Navajo and a senior at Wingate, who plans to attend college next year. "You would never learn this in a non-Native American school," says Sean, a Zuni, who is also college-bound.

These young Native Americans who see the value of higher education, but who still treasure their own people and culture, are the reality that Lee has dreamed in his years of studying and teaching. This generation of Native Americans, he believes, is poised to benefit from the grassroots activism of the 1960s and 1970s that validated the Navajo's culture, their claim to land, and their right to participate in the American way of life.

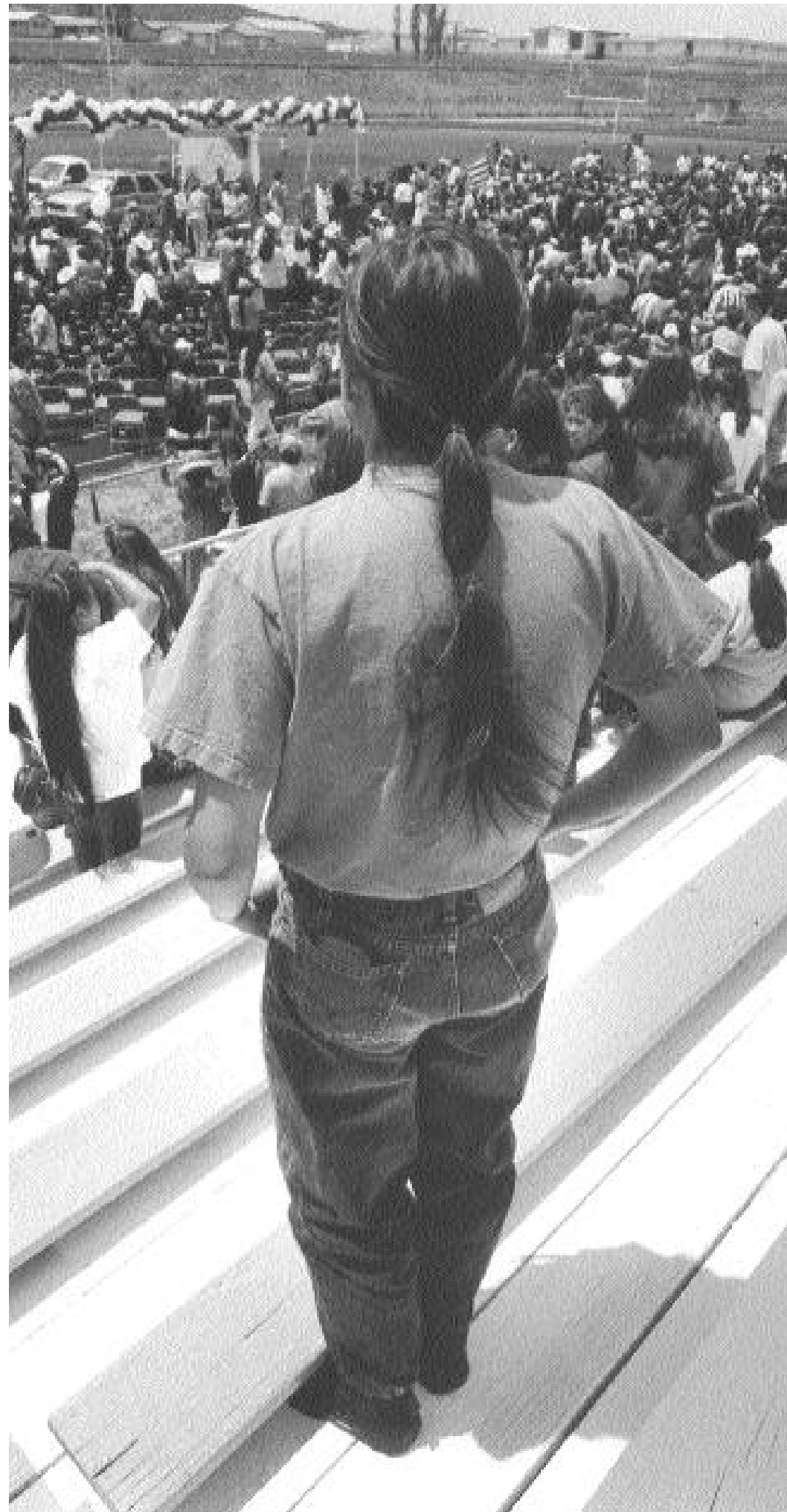
"I think my mission is to make sure the Navajo students don't forget their way and their culture," Lee says. "This is their opportunity to learn something about their lives and their past. Some of them are going to listen, and some don't get it. But I have to keep putting out energy and fighting to get these things accomplished. A lot of young Indian people think we need a new kind of warrior — warriors who can help their people in some way."

Such new warriors, Lee says, will need to work both on and off the reservation to make a better life for the Navajo. They are a proud, conservative people who have clung to their ways; they have repeatedly voted down the establishment of gambling casinos on their reservations. Yet they recognize the need for lawyers, businessmen, academics, policymakers, and teachers in order for their people to thrive.

Traditionally, four years is an important period of time for a young Navajo man. In his four years of teaching at Wingate, Lee has found that, while there is much to be done, there is even more to be learned — which is why he enrolled this past fall in a graduate program in Native American Studies at the University of New Mexico. He wants to build on the sense of purpose and peace that he has gained in his quest to help young Native Americans respect the value of their own land and people.

"I've realized that I'm not going to influence everybody," he says. "I've got to take it one person at a time. You can't make one path that's the right way for everybody — everybody's going to make their own path to make their lives happier and better. But I can be there to help and guide some of them." ■

*After his decision to leave Wingate, Lee teaches one of his final classes (far left); congratulates robed seniors(left); and watches from the bleachers (right) as graduation ceremonies end.*



"I am the first in my family to go to college, so being nominated for such a distinguished award as the Rockefeller Brothers Fund fellowship was an honor for me. Meeting other minority students entering the teaching profession has been wonderful. The program also helped me to pay for some of my graduate program and for the supplies and materials I needed during student teaching. Once I had started in the classroom, the educational loan repayments helped tremendously in cutting down the number of years it will take me to pay back Dartmouth and Stanford. It's good to know that the fellowship staff is watching out for me. I needed that when teaching had its ups and downs."





# Determined to Teach

## Joy Anderson

Alexander Wilson Elementary School » Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GREGORY BENSON

**A**LEXANDER WILSON SCHOOL IS IN A QUIET, somewhat run-down West Philadelphia neighborhood less than a mile from the campus of the University of Pennsylvania. Students fill the wide, black-topped playground to its chain-link fences, making the high-pitched chattering noises that can only be generated by an elementary school at recess – part singing, part laughing, part yelping, part shrieking, part talking loud enough to be heard over itself. Much of it filters up through the windows of Room 305, where Joy Anderson, a first-year classroom teacher, is quickly eating her lunch of soup and bread. She is no stranger to the sounds of the neighborhood – she grew up not far from there.

At the age of 25 Anderson is one of the youngest teachers at Alexander Wilson, and, like 60 percent of her fellow teachers, she is an African American. In addition to her teaching, she recently returned to Penn, her alma mater, to enter a doctoral program in educational policy. The pressure from her family to succeed – both

*(Right) Joy Anderson finds first-year classroom teaching both challenging and gratifying.*





*(Left) Anderson leads her students across the schoolyard.*

*(Right) Instilling a love for reading has been a major goal for Anderson during her first year.*



in teaching and in learning – is never far from her mind. “My mother calls me up,” she says, “and asks, ‘Did you finish your paper? Did you turn it in? How did you do on your last paper?’”

But the heaviest pressure comes from her new job at the Wilson School. Last year Anderson was a technology instructor, teaching students of all grade levels to use computers. Kids streamed in and out of her resource room; they enjoyed her classes, and many of them set up their own home pages on the World Wide Web. But this year she asked for her own class, and now she finds herself teaching 24 fourth-graders, managing two interns, and coordinating lessons with specialty teachers in math and science.

Like many beginning teachers, Anderson wasn’t prepared for the widely differing abilities of the children in her class. As more students with special needs are “mainstreamed” in public schools today, it’s not unusual to find children of all reading and learning levels in one classroom. She is also struggling with the problems of discipline that can overwhelm first-year teachers. Anderson is a quiet and thoughtful person, and when her fourth-graders refuse to listen, or argue back, she finds herself raising her voice, painfully aware that this person is not her real self. Reprimanding children and demanding their attention and waiting for quiet – these processes are all new to her.

**E**arly in the year, when the chaos became too great, Anderson turned to the most dependable resource she could think of – her family. Her mother came to school several times to help her daughter set up her classroom and to make it look welcoming with posters and bulletin boards. “You are responsible for you,” Garfield the cat admonishes from one of their posters. Joy’s grandparents also stopped by several times to meet her students and her fellow teachers, and once she asked her aunt to come in and advise her on how to keep the class under control.

“I just told her to be firm and consistent,” her aunt says. Anderson began by assigning work for the children to do as soon as they sit down in class every morning. To shorten the long lines waiting for the pencil sharpener – the fourth-grade equivalent of an office watercooler – she brought in a second one. Once a month she had every child pull from a box a slip of paper that had the name of a classmate written on it. The children were then asked to be especially nice to the person whose name they had drawn, whether or not they were friends.

“She’ll get it,” says Wilson’s principal, Arthur Hall, who can rattle off the names of teachers in his school whose learning environment is as good as any in the city. “Stop by Room 200,” he says, “or Room 210. Joy will be right there with them in a couple of years. She’s only 25, and you don’t often find a young person with her level of maturity. She has a couple of guys in her class who are very mischievous, but Joy gives them something they can look forward to every day. She does a lot of extra tutoring, and that also helps the overall climate.”

One of Anderson’s greatest strengths is her deep desire to be a teacher. “When I was a child,” she recalls, “I wanted to be Constance Clayton.” Clayton was an African-American woman who was Philadelphia’s superintendent of schools from 1982 to 1993. Anderson’s mother, who once had dreams of being a nurse, tried to steer her daughter toward medicine and health care, but Joy was determined to teach. When she was at the University of Pennsylvania she designed her own undergraduate program to study the psychosocial development of the child. With financial help from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund she went on to earn her teaching certification and a master’s degree from Teachers College, Columbia University. During the summer she helped to start and run a vacation Bible school at the church across the street from her home.

“Children from the neighborhood would stop me on the street,” Anderson says, “or walk up on the porch and knock





on the door, or even knock on the window of the car if it was stopped at a traffic light. 'When is Bible school gonna start?' they'd say. 'Are you gonna have it this year?' They love vacation Bible school." Anderson knows from her experience at the Bible

school that children are eager to learn, and when things go well in her class at Wilson – when she can see the joy on the faces of students who are learning something new and important – she recognizes the feeling. It's the same feeling she has when she looks out at people listening to the gospel choir she belongs to. This kind of everyday joy is what she would like to bring to her classroom.

Coming back to teach in West Philadelphia was a major decision for Anderson. "I gave some thought to teaching in other places," she says, "and a few people urged me to try suburban and private schools. But I wanted to go where I was needed. In general I feel that a lot of children could do well with *any* teachers. But children like these need more. They don't have good resources or good teachers.

"I also wanted to teach children like the ones I see every day in my neighborhood. I like teaching African Americans. When I was student-teaching in New York City, I taught in mixed classrooms, but what I really enjoy is teaching African Americans. I'm not sure why – I would probably have trouble explaining it – but it's an inherent pleasure."

Anderson gives a lot of thought to how children learn. "The crux of it," she believes, "is that they learn out of relationships. If a relationship is established, you can teach children all kinds of things. They take in much more than information. They pick up character, and love of reading, and love of learning – the things you really want to instill in students. Of course it's important to have a good curriculum, but the deep and important things that children learn come from being around people."

"It's been a tough year," Anderson admits. "What keeps me going is that I really have this desire to be a good teacher. I know there are areas where I'm lacking, like organization, but these give me challenges that I set for myself. I really want to be able to do this. When I feel like giving up I think of my commitments and my responsibilities, and I can't. A lot of things have been given to me – I feel blessed – so I keep going. I'm accountable to a lot of people: to the Rockefellers, to my family, to the children I teach, and to my church."

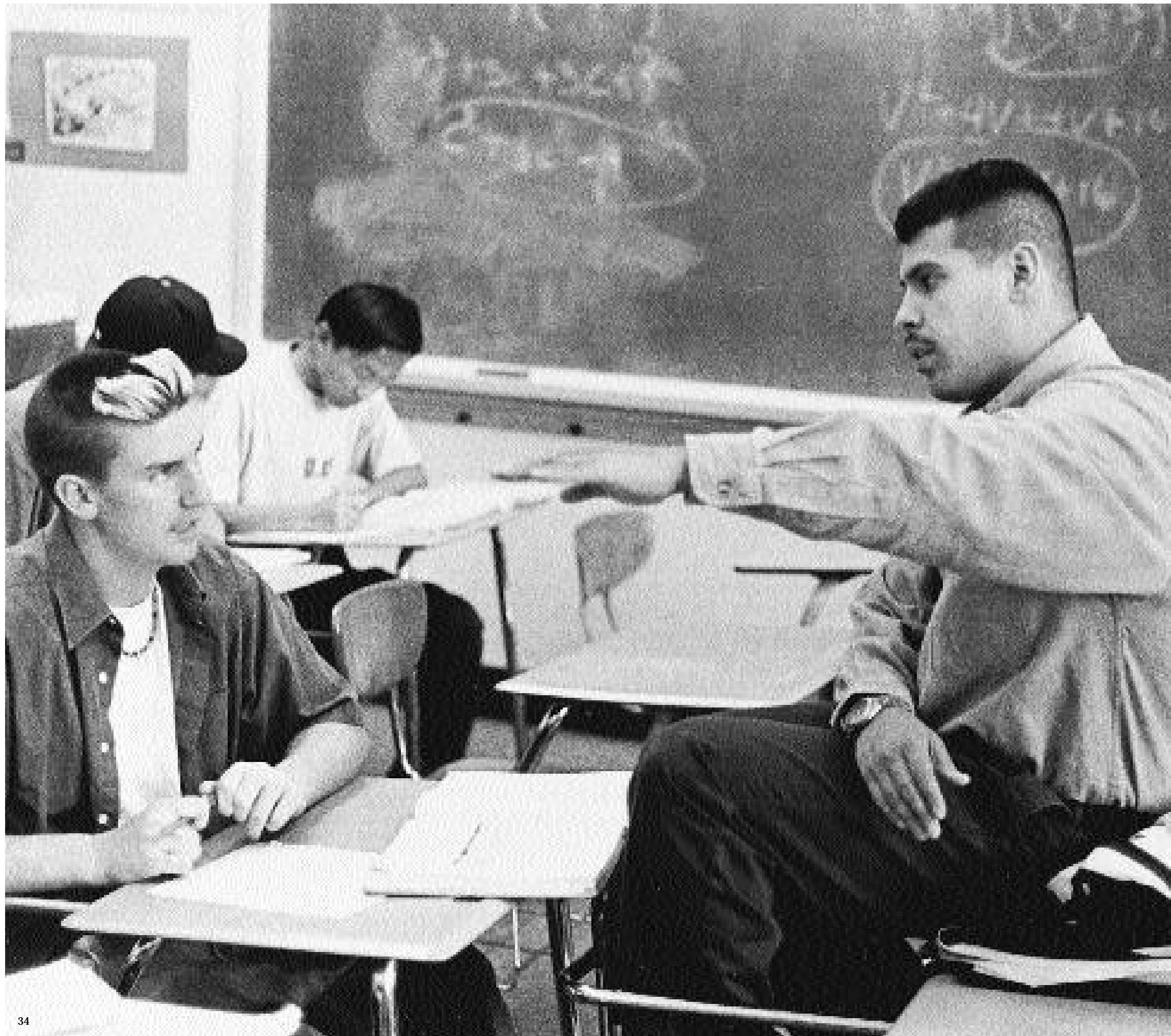
Looking back on her own childhood, Anderson says, "When I was too young to have hope for myself, my mother did. Someone hoped for you, or gave you a reason to have hope for yourself. Who will do it for children today? I will." ■

(Above) Anderson confers with her grandmother, a former teacher. (Right) She listens intently to her students' opinions and works with other teachers in assessing students' writing.



**T**he fellowship program has been a great benefit to me in several ways. It made it possible for me to work as an undergraduate with the Children's Defense Fund's North Philadelphia Freedom School Project. My mentor was a great help and a source of encouragement in my decision to become a teacher. Meeting other fellows at the summer workshop pushed me to take my education more seriously than I had before and to settle for nothing less than excellence. Together we can turn our hope into action and work with schools, churches, and communities to effect change. That is my purpose. An eighty-six-year-old woman at my church told me, "If you want to be on fire, get around some people who are on fire – it's catchy." The Rockefeller fellowships embody this wisdom of the ages by gathering students united in purpose and zeal into one program where they can help to ignite one another. ”





# The Power of Mathematics

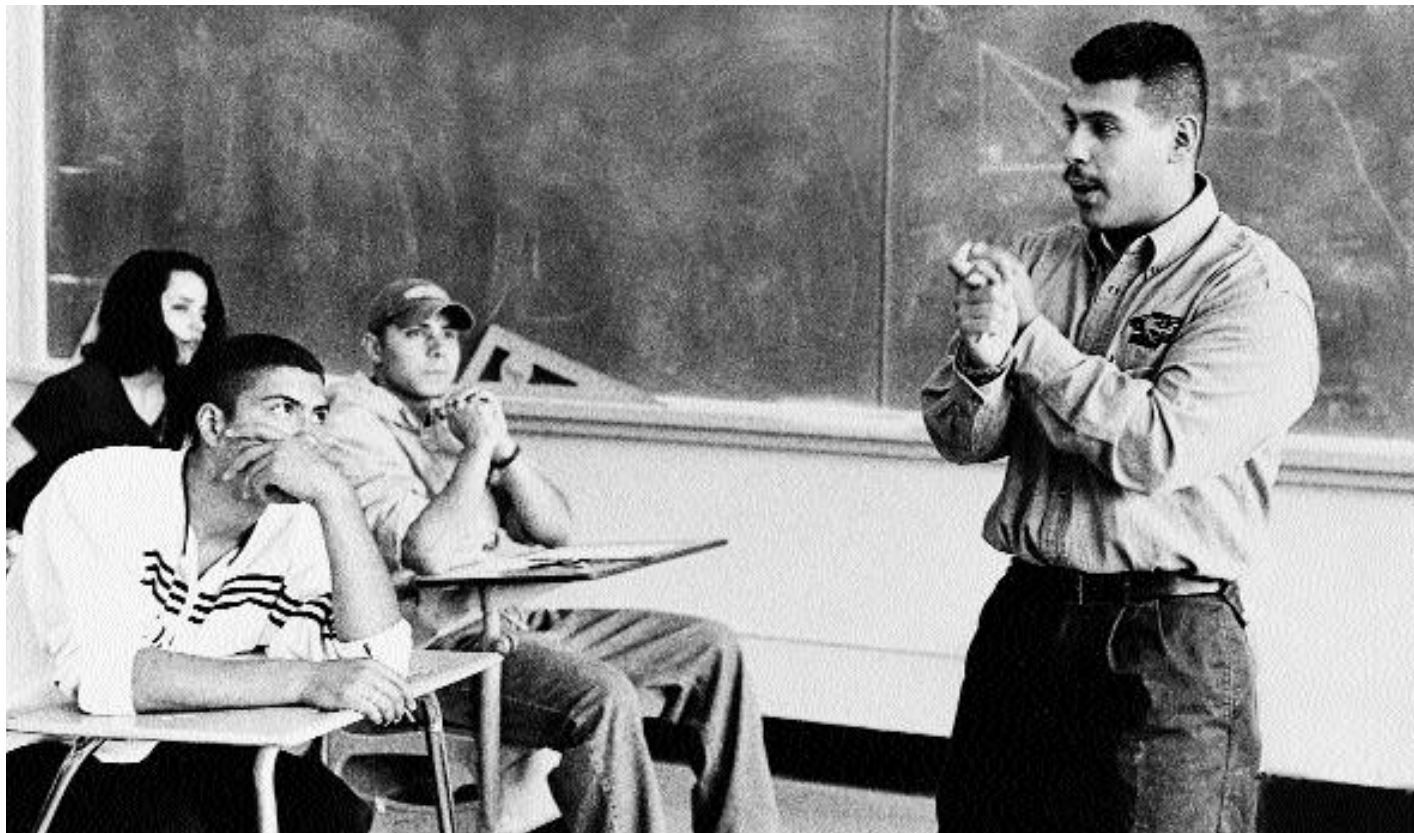
## William Marroquin

Fremont High School » Sunnyvale, California

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOM ERICKSON

**F**OR WILLIAM MARROQUIN, A FIRST-YEAR teacher of math at Fremont High School in Sunnyvale, California, numbers have always been a reminder of life's inescapable realities – and its unexpected rewards. When he was a nine-year-old boy growing up in San Salvador, he watched his father write out some numbers on a sheet of paper. They showed that he had earned more at his factory job before he was laid off than after he was rehired under a new contract. The mathematics of the situation convinced his parents that their future lay far away to the north, in a city called Los Angeles. His father went there to find work, and a calendar on the wall at home helped William to subtract the days, one by one, until the family was reunited a year later.

*(Left) William Marroquin makes mathematics come alive for his high school students.*



Numbers continued to encroach on him during his first few months in the new country, when ten friends and relatives shared a one-room apartment; and numbers threatened to overwhelm him when he was sent to one of the country's largest high schools. Belmont High School was better known for its gangs and its violence than for turning out first-generation Latin American math teachers. But when it counted, the numbers were on William Marroquin's side. He found one high school teacher, John Longmire, who nurtured his interest in mathematics and teaching. Next, he went to the University of California, Riverside, to do his undergraduate work, and from there, with a fellowship grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, he went to Stanford University for graduate work in education.

Now, on a bright day in early June, Marroquin is trying to put some of the power and the wonder of trigonometry into the hands of his students at Fremont High. Sunnyvale is an economically and ethnically diverse suburb of San Jose, and, while many of Marroquin's students understand the importance of education, just as many are easily distracted from the subject they are studying. Marroquin tries to engage them with projects and assignments that hold lessons for their own lives.

"O.K., check this out," he says. "Remember last week we were talking about sine, cosine, and tangent? Today we're going to take out those clinometers you made and measure the angle of elevation of some of the buildings and other things around here. Then we'll use the angle of elevation to figure out the height." He leads his flock of juniors out onto the school's broad front lawn, where they break up into groups. Some of them roll out measuring tapes; others peer up the side of their clinometers to the top of the flagpole.

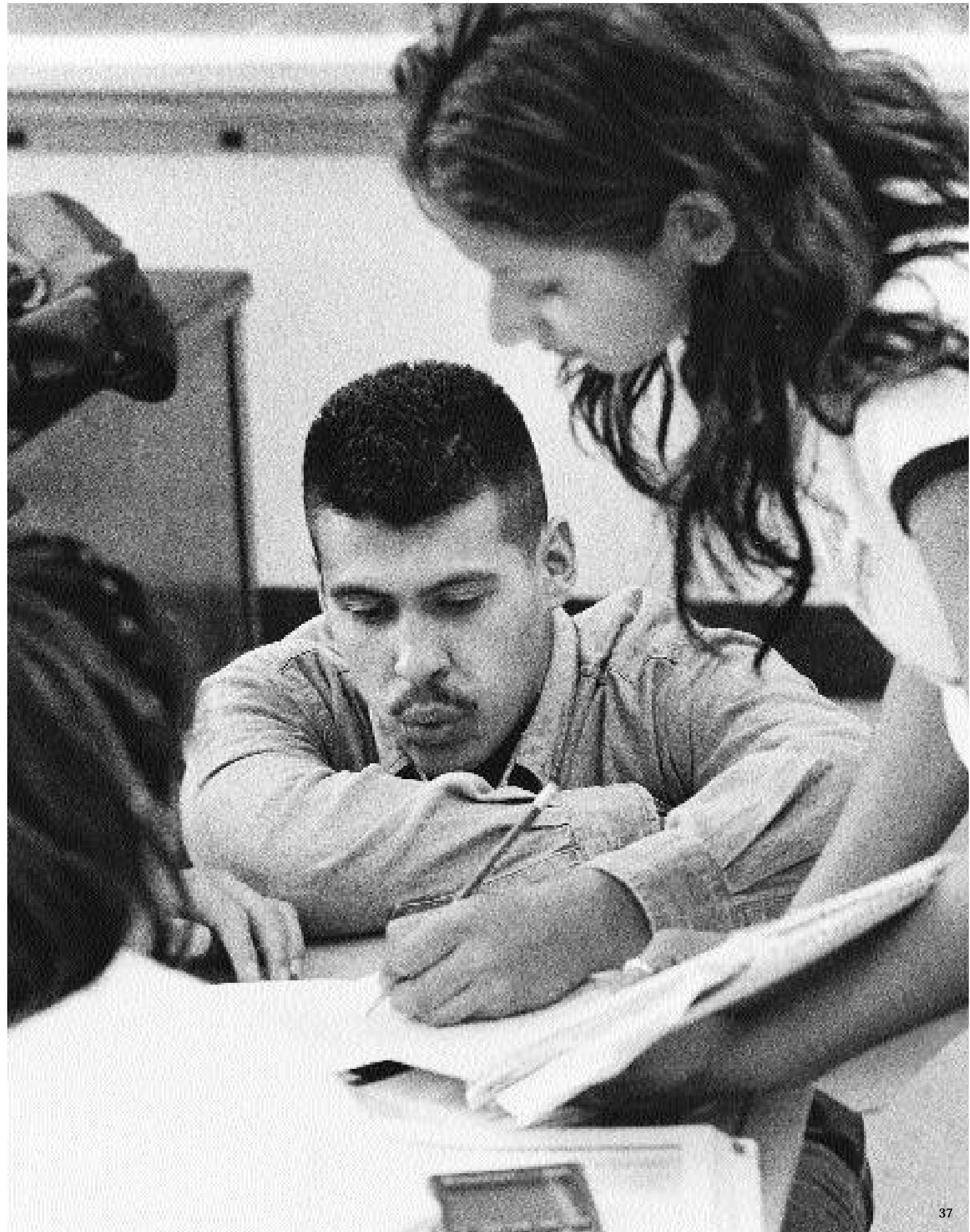
"From the beginning of time," Marroquin tells a visitor, "people have used math to figure out things they need to know. Maybe they owned a piece of land and wanted to know how much they had to plow for their food for the year. Or they wanted to figure out how much wood they needed to build a hut. Over the years, mathematics gradually developed into this very abstract way of thinking. But as a teacher I believe that we have to go back to those very simple ideas and needs that people developed math for in the first place. It's time to bring some of that back into teaching."

One day Marroquin asked a fellow math teacher, Chris Kenison, to come into his class and lay out a task for the students. "I told them," Kenison recalls, "that I wanted to build a five-bedroom house, but that first I needed some important facts and figures to make it just right. I wanted the house to be 3,500 square feet, but I didn't want to pay too much for air-conditioning and heating, so the volume of the rooms had to be as small as possible. I also wanted to keep the price of paint down, so the outside surface area had to be kept to a minimum, too."

"I had about a 98 percent turn-in rate with that project," Marroquin says, still impressed with the result. "Some of the kids turned in stuff that just made me say, 'Whoa, this is great!' The biggest thing for me was that the kids were talking about how accurate they had to be in order to make the measurements work." He points to some of the detailed

*(Above) Marroquin holds the attention of students not much younger than himself.*

*(Right) He helps a student to successfully complete assigned problem sets.*







models that the students made, displayed up on a window ledge. "I thought, 'Yes, that's what it's all about, guys!'"

Marroquin first got to know Fremont High School when he interned there as part of his graduate work at Stanford. Its principal, Peter Tuana, saw right away that his intern had the makings of a real teacher. The school has a close relationship with Stanford's teacher-training program; as an experimental school it is often used as a proving ground for new teaching and administrative techniques. Fremont teachers often grade their students on the basis of projects and presentations, like the house models that Marroquin's students built to show their understanding of geometry.

Marroquin's use of that approach has made a strong impact on his students. In one lesson, he asked them to use measurements from skid marks at highway accidents to determine the speed at which cars had been going before they braked. Later the students interviewed people who had been in accidents to find out how fast they had been going, how far they skidded, and what kinds of injuries they suffered. One student interviewed someone who had been involved in a collision resulting in a death, and that opened everyone's eyes to the sometimes deadly power of mathematics and physics. In another project, he asked students to budget a *quinceñeros* – a kind of debutante party for Latin American girls.

But above and beyond Marroquin's teaching methods, there's something special in how he relates to all his students. Fremont is highly diversified – racially, ethnically, and economically. Some students come from the families of software engineers and executives, others from families on welfare. Marroquin's natural self-assurance and his awareness of life's realities help him to understand the wide range of interests and influences in the lives of his students that sometimes make school itself seem secondary – music, gangs, sports, relationships, finances, and family.



"To put it bluntly," says David Ulate, a fellow math teacher, "he's not a stuffed shirt. He brings something that says to kids, 'Just because I'm a teacher doesn't mean we can't be compatible as human beings. I like to work hard, but I also like to be social. Our conversation doesn't always have to be academic.'"

"Students are scarred by so many other things," Marroquin says. "I have girls in my class who've been raped or who've had abortions. I have guys who've been in jail or who've been stabbed. Although I grew up in L.A. and went to a big high school, I was personally sheltered from those things. When I went back to my old neighborhood and saw people from my old school, I thought that they would be just like me – getting along with a job or something. That was an eye-opener. Some of them were in jail, some were dead."

Marroquin has seen first-hand the life-altering effect of education, and as a sobering example he points to his own family – his father, who repairs appliances, and his mother, who cleans homes. "Do you want to be like them?" he asks his students. "Or do you want to be like me and go to graduate school and do something you really enjoy?"

Sometimes it needs only one teacher to take an interest in a

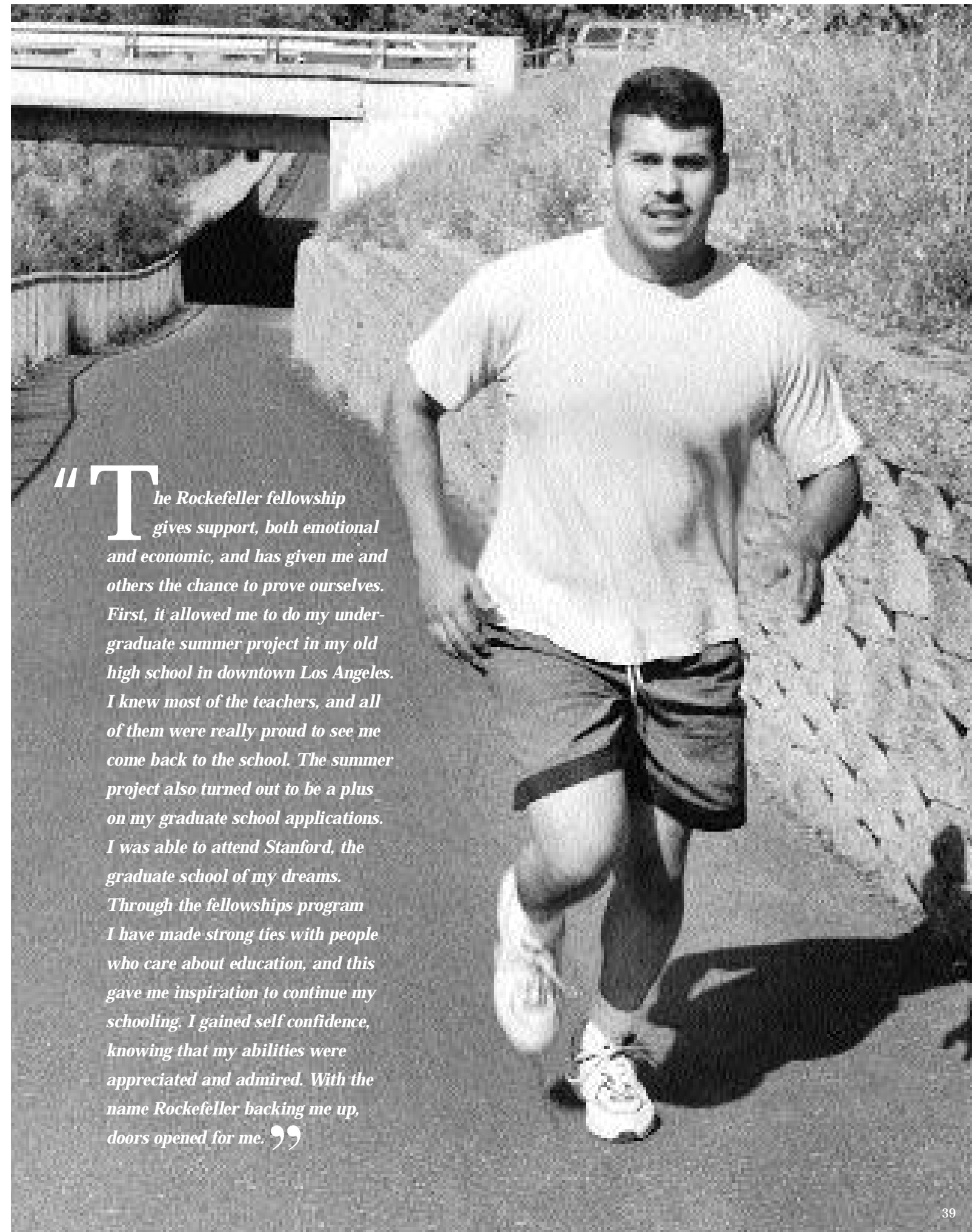


seemingly average student and to find the enthusiast inside, as Marroquin knows from John Longmire, his high school mentor, who encouraged his aptitude for mathematics. "In my second year at Stanford," he recalls, "I ran into a financial problem, even with my Rockefeller Brothers Fund fellowship, and I thought I might have to drop out of school for a little while. Then one of my teachers from high school called me to say that Mr. Longmire had left me something in his will. I thought it was going to be some books, or something like that. But it was a check for \$1,000 – enough to pay my tuition bills so I could stay in school. That story is always a reminder to me of how important it is for a teacher to really know his students."

"That's the story of my life," Marroquin says. "You can't get lost in the numbers game, even if the odds are against you. Good things fall out of nowhere all the time if you're ready to take advantage of them." ■

*Marroquin checks a student's work at the board (above left) and displays three-dimensional models that students built to scale, using mathematical calculations (center).*

*Unwinding from a demanding schedule, he jogs near his home after a day of classes (right); and joins other Rockefeller teaching Fellows for dinner in San Francisco (left).*



**"T**he Rockefeller fellowship gives support, both emotional and economic, and has given me and others the chance to prove ourselves. First, it allowed me to do my undergraduate summer project in my old high school in downtown Los Angeles. I knew most of the teachers, and all of them were really proud to see me come back to the school. The summer project also turned out to be a plus on my graduate school applications. I was able to attend Stanford, the graduate school of my dreams. Through the fellowships program I have made strong ties with people who care about education, and this gave me inspiration to continue my schooling. I gained self confidence, knowing that my abilities were appreciated and admired. With the name Rockefeller backing me up, doors opened for me."



# A Bridge Over the Border

## Mireya Jiménez

Westmont Elementary School » Pomona, California

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LINDA LEWIS

“I HAVE A TENDENCY TO WALK FAST,” SAYS Mireya Jiménez over her shoulder as she unlocks the door to an office at Westmont Elementary School in Pomona, California, where she is the language coordinator. “This is my crazy office. This is how you get hold of me,” she continues, lifting a crackling walkie-talkie to her ear. “This is Mireya,” she says into the walkie-talkie. “Yes, we’re having the meeting in Room 18 in just a few minutes.”

A few moments later she arrives at Room 18, followed by a group of sixth-grade girls. They are carrying the makings of an ample brunch from Mireya’s car – a coffee urn, a platter of fruit, bagels, cream cheese, danish, knives, forks, cups, and juice. “The first rule is ‘offer refreshments,’” Mireya says. Turning to another group of children, she asks them to arrange all the desks and chairs into a large U. She hopes this will make it easier for the people at her meeting to talk about their concerns.

*Mireya Jiménez (at left) talks to parents at tea honoring their work as school volunteers.*







Jiménez has assumed responsibility for making sure that the students' parents, many of whom are mainly Spanish-speaking, feel welcome in the school, where most of the classes and conversations are conducted in English. At today's meeting they will discuss how to spend \$20,000 of the school budget that has been earmarked for computer equipment and software intended to help students to become better readers. Jiménez wants the parents to know that the school is interested in their opinions – in any language. Ten minutes later the first few parents start filling the chairs nearest the door, and the room begins to buzz with Spanish. Eventually 25 mothers find their way into the early-morning meeting. Robbie Zendejas, Westmont's principal, arrives to greet them.

"*Buenos días a todos!*" she says.

Keeping Spanish alive at 82 percent Hispanic Westmont has become a grail for Jiménez, who is in her fifth year on the staff. Raised in Palm Springs by Spanish-speaking Mexican immigrant parents, she felt from her earliest grade-school days that she was uncomfortably straddling a wall between two languages and cultures. Although she could speak Spanish fluently, she couldn't read or write it. That was done in English, a language in which she felt less competent than her wealthier Palm Springs classmates. And when she visited her cousins in Jalisco, Mexico, they made fun of her Spanish pronunciation and sentence structure.

For Jiménez it became a serious issue of self-esteem. When she was nominated to represent her high school on a trip to the state capital, she assumed that she had been selected by mistake, and she turned down the trip. Although many colleges accepted her application, she felt that it had more to do with her ethnic background than with her classroom accomplishments. Those feelings came to a head when she was a graduate student at Claremont University. A non-Latino boyfriend who was studying Spanish asked her how to spell "sneeze" in Spanish. He disagreed with her answer and consulted a dictionary.

"My parents came from a small town in Mexico," Jiménez explains, "and they had a country accent. Because of their pronunciation I thought there was a 'd' in the word. My boyfriend assured me that there wasn't, and he was right. It was a small thing, but it just totally devastated me. I thought, 'How could I have been wrong about something

so simple? I'm not American and I'm not Mexican. I don't even know who I am.'"

That was the beginning of Mireya's commitment to bilingual education. Many studies have shown that bilingual education not only raises the self-esteem of non-English speakers; it also improves their fluency in written and spoken English. A second language doesn't crowd English out of a child's head. On the contrary, fluency in one language creates a fertile bed in which other languages can take root and prosper. When students take pride in their native tongue, they can also help other students to learn that language. Jiménez sees herself at the center of that nurturing process. As the language coordinator at Westmont, she is the bridge connecting immigrant parents, their assimilating children, and a beleaguered institution. Everyone in this triangle sees her as a vital conduit.

Instead of allowing Spanish-speaking students to disappear into themselves, she induces them to jump into new activities and subjects. When she taught third-graders about the pioneers coming over the Rocky Mountains, she had them climb over the chairs in her classroom to show how difficult the trek was. To give students a taste of Latino culture she enlisted the help of a fellow teacher, Alex Cristales, to teach the children their native salsa and merengue dances.

"Dance is probably the most important part of Latin American culture," says Cristales, who was born in El Salvador. "It's how Latin American people express their feelings and their emotions – their thoughts about themselves as a people." Salsa and merengue are the dances that the parents of many Spanish-speaking students would have grown up on. Learning these dances makes the students feel connected to their parents just when they may be feeling ambivalent about their ethnic background. The dances also

*(Left) Helping students like Daisy Moreno, Jiménez remembers her own early struggles learning to read English.*

*(Above, left to right) As a bilingual teacher, Jiménez works with Spanish-speaking students on writing skills; gives additional help to those who linger in classroom during recess; leads a stretching exercise in physical education; and teaches signing for words to a Spanish holiday song.*

build a bridge between the school and the parents by showing them that the school values their cultural heritage. In his own case, Cristales recalls, no such welcoming atmosphere was provided in grade school for children who grew up in homes where different cultures prevailed and English was seldom spoken.

California's Proposition 227, which was passed in 1998, had a seismic effect on the state's bilingual education programs. The law mandated that schools offer English-only immersion programs to children whose English was not yet fluent. While the law stopped short of outlawing bilingual programs, its aggressive interpretation in some school systems stunted or even dismantled bilingual course offerings. In Mireya's school district, teachers were instructed not to discuss their own opinions of the value of bilingual education with the parents of their students. Across the state, many Spanish-speaking parents were led to believe that their children would learn faster in English-only programs. For bilingual teachers it was a heart-wrenching time.

"There were many students who I thought could have really benefitted from the bilingual program," Jiménez recalls. "What should we do?" the parents asked me. I had to tell them I wasn't allowed to give my own opinion – that I could lose my job." Prohibiting teachers from giving their opinion on education, Jiménez felt, was like muzzling a doctor on the subject of medicine. She and her fellow bilingual teachers took their concerns to a union meeting and insisted that a committee be formed to study various ambiguous situations created by Proposition 227.

It was Jiménez who stood up at the union meeting and demanded action. Three times the union representative asked that the issue be tabled. But other bilingual teachers began to stand up and tell their stories of how Proposition 227 had set back everything they believed in as educators. Finally, the union promised to address those issues. As a result of that meeting, a bilingual committee was formed, with Jiménez as chair, and the union's legal counsel later found that Proposition 227 did in fact allow teachers to make recommendations to parents about whether their children would benefit from bilingual classes. Unfortunately, the damage had been done. "The students who had stayed in bilingual programs were fine," says Westmont's principal, Robbie Zendejas, "but those who went from a bilingual program to an all-English immersion class weren't comfortable speaking English and were very quiet in class."

That's exactly the kind of situation that Jiménez won't allow to continue. Next year she will return to the classroom as a tenured teacher and as an advocate for bilingualism. As Zendejas points out, in the public schools of California today there's no substitute for teachers who have the skills – and the dedication – of Mireya Jiménez. "With the cognitive adjustment that children have to make to learn English," she says, "it's imperative that we have fully credentialed teachers like Mireya here. It's not an option. It's a necessity." ■

*(Right) Jiménez jokes with girls after end-of-the-year soccer game between students and teachers.*



**"T**he fellowship program has given me a sense of great pride and confidence. It allowed me to pay for some of my graduate school tuition, and it also eased my financial situation in terms of cost of living (room and board). Once I started teaching, the program helped me in the repayment of my education loans. This was crucial for me, since I had just bought a house by myself near my school. I am now part of my school's community, which makes me quite proud! This is only the monetary aspect, of course, but it has given me confidence in myself. The summer workshops have been very inspiring. I very much enjoyed being surrounded by such powerful teachers-to-be, and their enthusiasm was contagious. It made me remember I wasn't alone. Though it may sound corny, I've felt like they're a little family that backs me up. "





# An Oasis of Support

## Nhung “Cathy” Nguyen

Jane Addams School » Lawndale, California

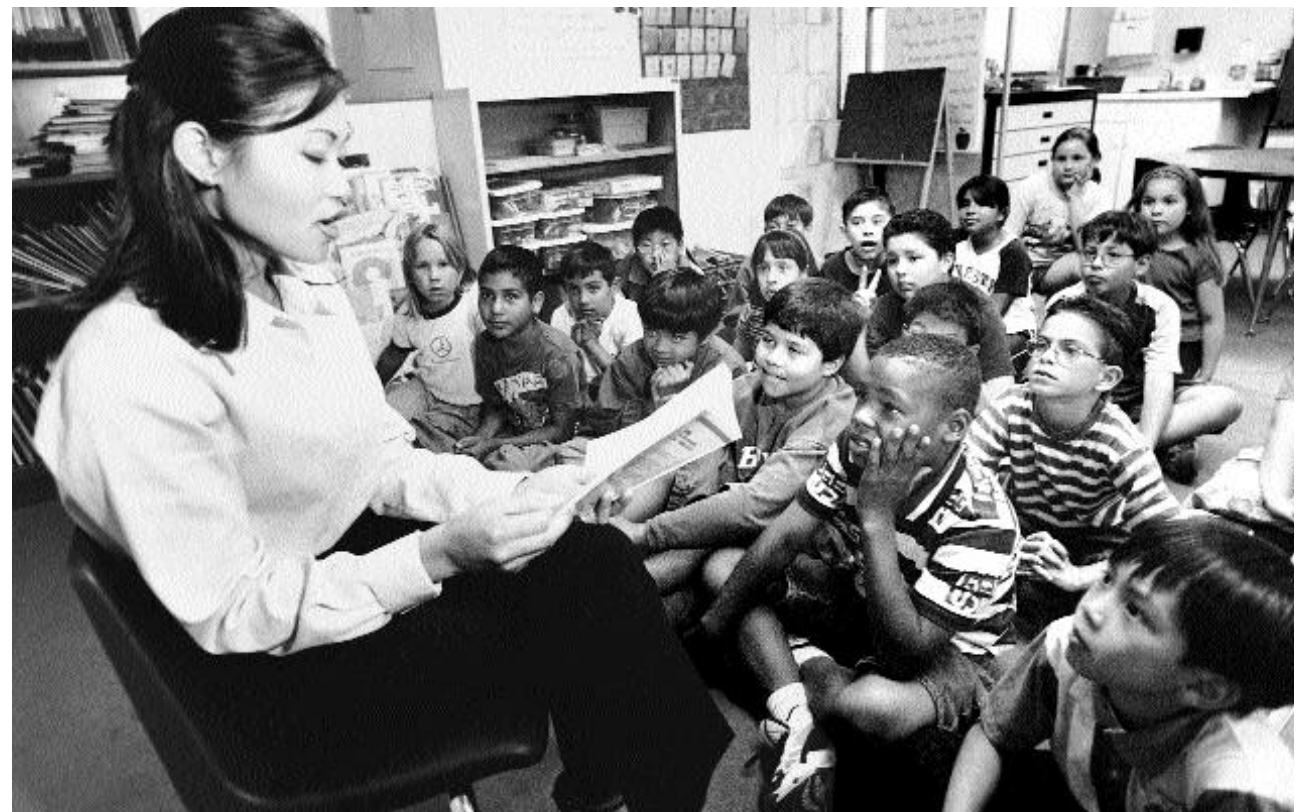
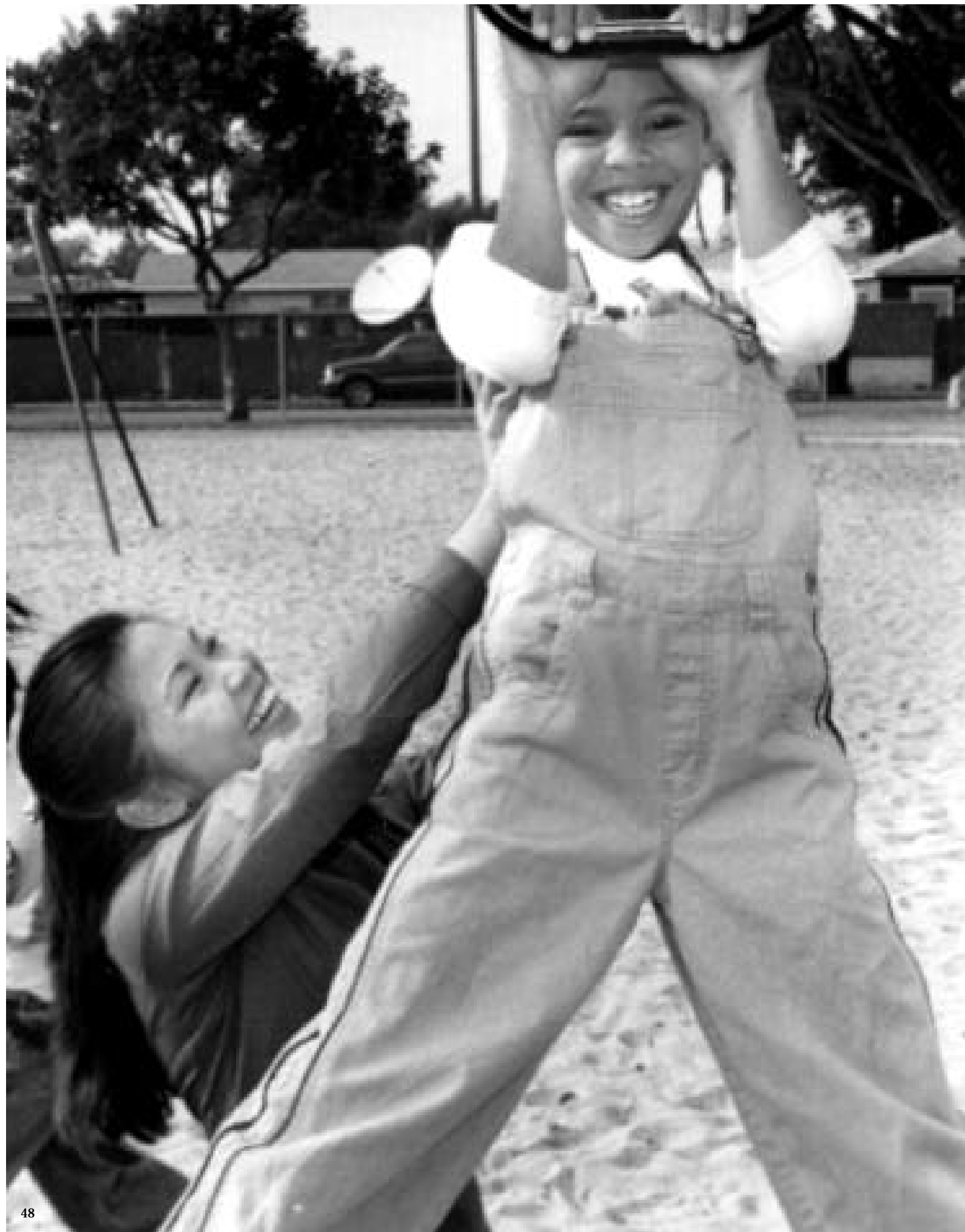
PHOTOGRAPHS BY GLENN MARZANO

**C**ATHY NGUYEN (PRONOUNCED “WIN”) teaches third grade in the Jane Addams School in Lawndale, California, a community of about 30,000 in southern Los Angeles County.

Like much of the region, Lawndale’s neighborhoods and schools are a mixture of Asians and Latin Americans, African Americans and whites, immigrants and long-time Angelenos – in a now-familiar American blend.

One day one of Nguyen’s students approached her with a new book called *Onion Tears*. Other children gathered around, intrigued by the unusual title. “Read it to us, Miss Nguyen,” they said. The book was about a Vietnamese girl who lost her family in the war and is now trying to adjust to life without them in a new country, the United States. Afterward the third-graders asked Nguyen to repeat her own story of how she came to this country when she was four. It’s a story that many of her students, uprooted in their own lives, have come to think of as their own.

*(Left) Cathy Nguyen lifts crab from classroom tank for her students to examine.*



**N**hung “Cathy” Nguyen was born into her country’s civil war. Her father had no profession before he became a soldier. In the mid-1970s the Nguyen family wandered around the countryside, trying to stay close enough to the guerilla front where her father was fighting so that he could come “home” at night. As the war dragged on, it became clear to Nguyen’s father that South Vietnam was going to lose the war and that there would be a bloodbath. He made arrangements for the family to escape by boat. But when the time came to leave, he was nowhere to be found; they would have to go without him.

As the tightly-packed boat drifted around the South China Sea, the supplies of rice and water dwindled. One afternoon another fishing boat full of refugees appeared from out of nowhere. Amazingly, Nguyen’s father was aboard. The Nguyen family was reunited, and the two lost boats parted ways. A few days later an enormous tanker bound for the Philippines scooped up the refugees. From Manila the Nguyens were flown to Florida, where they were taken in by an American family who were, like themselves, Catholics. A few years later they learned that they had relatives in California, and they moved to Los Angeles, where they have been ever since.

Now, at her elementary school, Nguyen teaches children who are living their own stories of survival. Family is everything to Nguyen, and she sees her students as a family that she must energize and nurture every day. “She’s a perfect teacher, in a way,” says Frank Noyes, her principal. “She has the time and the dedication to give to students, and she’s always learning new ways of reaching out to them.”

It wasn’t always so easy for Nguyen, who is now in her fifth year at Jane Addams. She came to the school with no

real classroom experience, and she often felt, as many new teachers do, that there was no way she could have been adequately prepared for the task ahead. Assigned to a combined first- and second-grade classroom, she was never given clear instructions on how the curriculum should be handled. Discipline problems were frequent and often, it seemed, intractable.

“I had some students who couldn’t pass the grade level and had been held back – they were bigger than me,” says Nguyen, a slender woman no more than five feet tall. To make matters worse, she felt that she got little support for her efforts to keep the classroom quiet. Students were seldom reprimanded for disrupting the class. Nguyen herself became filled with frustration and self-doubt.

“It was the worst year of my life,” she says. “I would go home and cry. The only thing my parents could tell me was what a mistake I had made in deciding to become a teacher. ‘Why didn’t you go to nursing school like we told you to?’ they said. ‘Like your sisters did?’”

**B**ut Nguyen was determined to survive. When the school allotted only \$400 for classroom supplies, she used her own money to buy alphabet charts and bulletin boards. She also spent extra time working with her students on reading. With a grant for leadership development

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*(Left) Nguyen boosts Mattie’a Collins to overhead apparatus.*

*(Above) She holds the attention of her class as she reads stories that relate to their own lives.*

from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, she instituted a program to teach students and their parents how to use the Internet and e-mail. Only by involving the parents in their children's education, she felt, would she be able to make a difference in her students' lives. She also hoped the program would overcome the gap between home and school.

"At the end of every school year," she explains, "it's been extremely hard for me to feel that I have successfully completed my job as an educator. Why? Because I didn't feel as if I had touched the whole of each child – only the part of them that came to school. I felt that I knew that child for who and what they could do during school hours. The rest was beyond my reach."

**W**hen Frank Noyes came to Jane Addams in 1996, the school atmosphere improved to the point where Nguyen could finally teach as she wanted to. Literacy scores in her classes have risen dramatically, and some students have made great progress in learning. But some problems won't go away. Lawndale is what administrators describe as a "low-wealth" area – which means that 85 percent of the students are on partial or full lunch assistance programs, and many of them also receive daily breakfasts.

"The biggest challenge to many of our students," says Kristen Holm, Nguyen's third-grade teaching partner, "is what they face at home. After school and on weekends there's no telling what kind of situation they may be in. Some

A firm hand during first the two or three months of the year pays off for Nguyen. By the end of the fall semester her seven- and eight-year-olds discover that she's a warm and thoughtful person; she only disciplines them because she wants them to learn. A color-coded behavior chart at the far end of the room tells whether they are in good graces, on probation, or isolated in time-out for repeatedly disrupting the class. They always know where they stand with Miss Nguyen.

In her first year, she recalls, she had a Vietnamese student who had a reputation for being belligerent and unruly. One day he pushed another child in the playground and wouldn't apologize. He withdrew into himself and wouldn't speak to anybody. "He still hadn't made the connection that I was Vietnamese like him," Nguyen recalls, "so I decided to try talking to him in his own language. You should have seen his eyes light up! He ran over to a group of Vietnamese kids and whispered something to them. They all came back together and asked me, 'How do you know how to speak our language?'"

From that day on, the same teachers who had branded the child a behavior problem the year before began to comment on how he had blossomed into a cooperative and motivated student. Being addressed in his primary language, by a teacher from his own country, gave him a sense that he could be heard and that he belonged to the school.



have lost relatives to drive-by shootings; others have been separated from their parents or their siblings. Quite a few are also affected by their parents' use of alcohol and drugs."

That's why Nguyen feels it's crucial for her to make her classroom an oasis of support and stability. Her supervisors and colleagues say she is extremely organized, planning lessons to the minute. She and Holm spend hours brainstorming class projects, and Nguyen keeps files on those that have worked out. During one recent lesson, one-third of her 20 students sat reading books at a C-shaped table while Nguyen sat in the middle and helped them along; one-third listened to a book on tape; and the rest made as many words as they could out of the letters in "beautiful." As each group shifted from one task to the next, the students quickly became interested in the new project.

But it's not just Vietnamese or Asian children who share a bond with Nguyen. All the children seek her respect and attention. Her students understand that she knows what it means to be frustrated again and again and to continue to strive – and that's what she encourages them to do. Today Nguyen knows that teaching is going to be her career. Just as important, her parents have also accepted that fact. "The statistics say that if you can survive the first five years, you're in for the long haul," she says. "I see myself teaching for a good number of years." ■

*Nguyen energetically joins her students in a boisterous game of wall ball (above); and enjoys the quiet beauty of her mother's garden (right).*



**"O**ver and over again I have been asked why I chose to teach. My reply is always the same – I want to know that I can make a difference in the lives of children. Here are some ways the Rockefeller Brothers Fund program has been of benefit to me: 1. It has made me proud of what I do and encouraged me to do my very best; 2. It has made me a better educator, knowing that I represent a prestigious program; 3. It enabled me to attend graduate school; 4. It encouraged me to apply to graduate schools I felt were 'too good' to accept me; 5. It was a constant motivator for me to finish my master's program; 6. Through the fellowship, I have made lasting friendships with others who I can call on to share my troubles and joys of life and teaching; 7. It has given me the endurance and motivation to work day by day."





# Hurdling Preconceived Notions

## Delvin Dinkins

Conestoga High School » Berwyn, Pennsylvania

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID SWANSON

**I**N HIS 8:00 A.M. ADVANCED PLACEMENT class in English literature at Conestoga High School in Berwyn, Pennsylvania, a town on the Main Line, west of Philadelphia, Delvin Dinkins does not at the moment appear to be busy. Actually, he is mentoring a teaching intern who has just begun a class discussion about the meaning of redemption in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Three students have been assigned to lead the class in talking about what they have read. In the back of the room, Dinkins takes notes and watches everything.

A 28-year-old African American, Dinkins has a reputation for being compulsively organized and well prepared. He is constantly making schedules and "to-do" lists. Usually he arrives at Conestoga at about 7:00 A.M. to prepare for the day. He teaches until 3:00 and then coaches track until 5:30. By the time he picks up his son and daughter from the day-care center and drives home, it's 6:45. In the evening he has tests and essays to read and to grade, sometimes as many as one hundred.

*(Right) Delvin Dinkins writes recommendations for his students who are applying to college.*





“Making lists is probably just a way of procrastinating – a way to put off starting,” says Dinkins, who is now in his fifth year at the school. “All my friends make fun of me.” Once, when he was in college, he tried to stop making lists, but within a week he was back at it, and now he freely indulges himself. His schedules almost always include a margin of what he calls “miscellaneous time” – time to catch up. “No schedule is perfect,” he explains.

**D**inkins’s addiction to lists may be the residue of helping his mother, who raised him and three brothers on her own in the nearby town of Chester. Wanda Dinkins often worked double nursing shifts so that her boys wouldn’t have to go without the clothes and toys that their friends had. Although Delvin was the third-oldest child, he felt that it was his duty to take some weight from her shoulders – to do a load of wash or make dinner. “The sense of responsibility I had for my mother made me structure my life,” he says.

For this morning’s class on *The Scarlet Letter* he has made a list of some of the topics he wants to cover. But for now he just listens. He has confidence in this class to keep the discussion on a productive level; there’s no whispering among the students, no joking or digression. Only when there’s a lull does Dinkins begin to speak, and all eyes turn toward him.

“The nature of sin and redemption was part of the fabric of Puritan town life,” he says. “People were categorized as redeemed or in a state of sin, as much as they were considered alive or dead. The power of redemption was crucial to a person’s acceptance by the community. What do you think Jonathan Edwards would have to say about Reverend Dimmesdale?” Checkpoint number one on Dinkins’s list of topics has been hit, and he returns to listening and observing.

Dinkins’s file drawers contain thick folders of notes and relevant readings for each of his classes, and he shares these with his interns. After every class he wants to know which techniques worked for which students, and why. He wants to know how long students are likely to have a meaningful exchange on a particular topic – five minutes on this, eight minutes on that. He will go to extreme lengths to make sure the class stays on his schedule.

“Once, he asked everyone in the class to turn around,” says the school’s principal, Susan Yates, “and talk with the person behind them for one minute about a certain point in a book they were reading. *One minute*. It really focused their attention.” His classroom is like a chessboard to a chess master – he can turn away from it and still know what’s going on and how to intervene. He’s fascinated by the classroom, constantly innovating. “He’s the best English teacher I’ve ever seen,” says Yates, “and I’m an English teacher.”

Dinkins discovered his bent for teaching at Swarthmore Academy, a private high school, where he was a National Honor Society student. The school had a summer Upward Bound program that enabled him to visit museums and attend plays and concerts in Philadelphia. Later he became an Upward Bound counselor himself.



(Left) As coach of the men’s track team, the Conestoga Pioneers, Dinkins checks runners’ strides.

(Above) At local meet, Dinkins reads the running times of women’s track team that has won a distance medley. In honors class, he leads a discussion on Arthur Miller and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Before practice, he addresses men’s track team.

Next, at Swarthmore College, Dinkins majored in English and in chemistry, partly because his mother urged him to go into medicine; she wanted him to be a cardiopulmonary specialist. But in his junior year he read Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities*, an indictment of the American educational system and its treatment of the poor and minorities. "The book didn't reflect my own experience," he says, "but it made me feel really bad. I was shaking my head while I was reading it, thinking about what it meant for other people. It had a huge impact on my decision to be a teacher."

At first that decision didn't impress his mother. "I had to convince her," Dinkins says, "that you could contribute in lots of different ways and that my contributions were no less valuable for being in this profession." Today he feels that his role as a teacher is vital in creating a leadership image for African Americans.

His first teaching job was in a New Jersey public school, where he taught English to a room full of students who had been put in the same class because of disciplinary problems. The teacher who preceded him, a 30-year veteran of the school system, had suddenly quit after having a fistfight with a student. "They wanted to see if they could scare me off, too," Dinkins recalls, "and a couple of times I did blow my top. That environment has a tendency to bring things out of you that you didn't know were there. But I stuck to my guns."

Dinkins's present job at Conestoga grew out of a job fair in Madison Square Garden in New York, where five hundred school districts were interviewing teaching candidates.



Outside, the line stretched around the block. Intensive interviews at three booths resulted in Dinkins's being invited to a smaller job fair in the Philadelphia area, where, after another flurry of interviews, he was delighted to find himself hired by a school that was only a half-hour's drive from his mother and stepfather's home. Now he and his wife and their two children have a home in nearby Exton. "I wanted to teach in a place where I could actually *teach* – where I would have the support I didn't have in New Jersey," Dinkins says. "In New Jersey they wanted lesson plans that were written according to a pre-set structure. But I wanted not only to teach but to teach *well*, and I can do that here."

During his first year at Conestoga the parents of one student complained that Dinkins was too "forceful." "I always

let the students know that if they haven't done what's required there are going to be consequences," he explains. But the situation may have been exacerbated, he thinks, because of his race – he was the only African-American teacher on the school's academic staff. That experience has never stopped him, however, from running his classes as tightly as any teacher at Conestoga. Now there are no questions about his classroom style. "Often," he says, "students who are about to take one of my courses say, 'I've heard about you. I know how things work.'"

But Dinkins likes to be responsive to the interests of his students, and Conestoga gives him the flexibility to accommodate their requests. One group of upperclass students asked him to design a course in modern American literature that he is now teaching. "They wanted to read some things outside the canon – writers like Kate Chopin and Richard Wright and Zora Neale Hurston," Dinkins says. "So I just wrote up a syllabus and handed it in, and that was it. I think the administration trusted me to come up with something good."

"Teachers from other districts make jokes about us," Dinkins says, "because our school is like Utopia." *The Philadelphia Inquirer* recently reported that Conestoga spends more per capita on its 1,470 students than any other school in Chester County. Four out of five teachers have completed postgraduate work, and their average teaching experience is 14 years. Ninety-two percent of the 1999 graduating class went on to a four-year college.

"They're great," Dinkins says of Conestoga's students. "These are the children of some of the most influential people in the area, and they're very serious about school." It's also a group, he believes, that desperately needs to see and to experience the excellence and the imagination of African-American professionals. "Part of the problem is that we don't dialogue enough about race. These kids are going to be our future leaders – many of them are from families that are already doing well. They're going to be in power and they're going to need to hash these things out. That's why I often step out of the circle and let them talk it out honestly among themselves."

"Part of what keeps me going is seriousness of purpose. If I'm not serious, that already puts me on the back burner. I have to overcompensate, so that everybody knows that I know what I'm doing. I'm hurdling every preconceived notion that people have." That seriousness is a powerful presence in his classroom. Delvin Dinkins's students realize that they have to measure up to the high standards of their African-American teacher. And that's one lesson they will never forget. ■

*Dinkins reads to Delvin Junior in nightly session (far left). In the kitchen with his wife, Davirah, and daughter, Bria, he chops onions for dinner (left).*

*(Right) At end of a long day of teaching and coaching, Dinkins heads to his car, carrying papers to be graded at home. On the way, he will collect his children from day care.*



"The fellowship program has provided me with unwavering financial, social, and professional support. The program has validated my interest and love for teaching by providing me with access to a cohort of young minority scholars doing the same thing I'm doing. I have felt empowered by the program's focus on teacher-scholars, which has provided plenty of opportunities for me to engage in serious self-reflection about education, society, and other issues by exchanging ideas and sharing beliefs with people I respect. In summary, the fellowship program has been both a source of inspiration and a source of power, and because the Fund has consistently been a part of my professional development, I have become what I hope is a very good teacher."

# Recipients of Rockefeller Brothers Fund Fellowships for Minority Students Entering the Teaching Profession

Of the 150 men and women thus far awarded fellowships, 89 are currently teaching in schools across the country. An additional 49 Fellows are, for the most part, on their way to becoming classroom teachers. Twelve Fellows have left the program, but still maintain an interest in education. (Michael Brox, who died tragically in a car accident, was replaced by another Fellow.)

JOSEPH AGUIRRE SOUTH PASADENA, CALIFORNIA	JULIAN BRAXTON CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS	CRYSTAL A. COOPER WASHINGTON, D.C.	SARAH ELWELL NEW YORK, NEW YORK	GAYLE HERRINGTON WASHINGTON, D.C.	ALISON MCKENZIE WOODSIDE, NEW YORK	KIMBERLY PHILLIPS-HATCHETT HOUSTON, TEXAS	KATHERINE SUYEYASU OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA
BLANCA AKERBOOM CHINO, CALIFORNIA	KATRINA BROWN SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND	YESSENIA CORREA JERSEY CITY, NEW JERSEY	ELENA ENRIQUEZ-SALAZAR DEL AIRE, CALIFORNIA	CRESENCIA HUFF SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS	JOSÉ MEDINA EL PASO, TEXAS	LILIA PICADO MONTEREY PARK, CALIFORNIA	JENNIFER THOMAS FLORALA, ALABAMA
NICOLE ALSTON KENT, WASHINGTON	THABITI BROWN BROOKLYN, NEW YORK	JENNIFER CORTEZ SYLMAR, CALIFORNIA	ROSAMARIE FIGUEROA MORENO VALLEY, CALIFORNIA	MICHAEL HUMPHREYS BRONX, NEW YORK	DIANA MERCADO MORENO VALLEY, CALIFORNIA	ROSEMARY POLANCO CHICAGO, ILLINOIS	WILLIAM THOMPSON ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN
JOY ANDERSON PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA	MICHAEL BROX * SUITLAND, MARYLAND	ADRIANA CORTEZ MONTEBELLO, CALIFORNIA	DANETTA FISHER BUSBY, MONTANA	MARIA HYLER SAN MATEO, CALIFORNIA	KISCHA MILLER BROOKLYN, NEW YORK	ERICA POON NEW YORK, NEW YORK	JEFFREY TOROMORENO WOODHAVEN, NEW YORK
CHI WAI AU SAN GABRIEL, CALIFORNIA	CRISSY CÁCERES PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA	TODD CRAIG BRONX, NEW YORK	ROCHELLE FLEMING BOZEMAN, MONTANA	MIREYA JIMÉNEZ POMONA, CALIFORNIA	VALERIE MITCHELL OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA	LETICIA QUINTERO HUNTINGTON PARK, CALIFORNIA	FELICIA TRIPP SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA
CATINA BACOTE BROOKLYN, NEW YORK	JANENE CAMPBELL-JONES UNIVERSITY, MISSISSIPPI	ANDREW DANILCHICK WALLINGFORD, PENNSYLVANIA	COLEEN FRONTIN HYATTSVILLE, MARYLAND	CANDICE JIMERSON CINCINNATI, OHIO	EDUARDO MORA NEW YORK, NEW YORK	GLORIA RAMOS SAN GABRIEL, CALIFORNIA	SANDRA VELASCO-ESPINOZA NORWALK, CALIFORNIA
LAUREN BANKS CHICAGO, ILLINOIS	TRACY CANARD SECOND MESA, ARIZONA	YVETTE DAUGHERTY CLEVELAND, OHIO	JUAN GARCIA JACKSON HEIGHTS, NEW YORK	ANGELA JOHNSON BROWNING, MONTANA	JUAN MORALES ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA	GUY REAVIS BROOKLYN, NEW YORK	SONIA VELAZQUEZ DOWNEY, CALIFORNIA
RUBY BAÑUELOS REGO PARK, NEW YORK	ISAIAS CANTU, JR. SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS	CARMEN DE LA CRUZ ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA	PATRICIA GARCIA GLENDALE, CALIFORNIA	DENISE JUNEAU HELENA, MONTANA	NADIRAH MORELAND OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA	DARLENE REEVES HOLLIS, NEW YORK	ANDRÉS VERSAGE SOUTH PASADENA, CALIFORNIA
ALEXIS BEARD SPANAWAY, WASHINGTON	ELIZABETH CARRIL-LUCIANO BROOKLYN, NEW YORK	ANA DE LOS SANTOS BROOKLYN, NEW YORK	RAUL GARCIA II JAMAICA PLAIN, MASSACHUSETTS	MANYVETH KHIEU BURNSVILLE, MINNESOTA	MARISELA MURILLO LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA	REBECCA RENARD SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA	TIMOTHY VESSEL DEERWOOD, MINNESOTA
SHAWN BECKETT NEW YORK, NEW YORK	EILEEN CHEN BRIGHTON, MASSACHUSETTS	DELVIN DINKINS EXTON, PENNSYLVANIA	GUADALUPE GARIBAY LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA	SOPHIA KING SILVER SPRING, MD	DARIA NEAL DETROIT, MICHIGAN	ANITA REVILLA SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS	CLAUDIA VON VACANO STANFORD, CALIFORNIA
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# Fellowships for Minority Students Entering the Teaching Profession

## About the Program

BY CAROLINE ZINSSER  
FORMER PROGRAM OFFICER  
ROCKEFELLER BROTHERS FUND

**T**HE DECISION TO CONTINUE THE ROCKEFELLER Brothers Fund's Fellowships for Minority Students Entering the Teaching Profession provides an opportunity to review and possibly to modify aspects of the program's structure. This essay, however, records and reflects on the program's basic design and the lessons learned during its first six years of recruitment.

### PROGRAM DESIGN

The fellowship program was designed to enable participants to gain the qualifications and experience necessary to ensure their success in teaching careers. It was structured to offer a succession of awards and incentives, and to provide several critical kinds of support – financial

assistance, mentoring, and peer reinforcement – along the way. The program was divided into four phases: **RECRUITMENT.** Twenty-five outstanding minority college juniors majoring in the arts and sciences were chosen each spring as Fellows, drawn from a pool of nominees submitted by selected colleges and universities. Students who applied for the program were first screened by a committee within their institutions; each institution could nominate up to three candidates. The Fund screened applications, and finalists were then interviewed at the Fund's offices by a committee of educators and judged on the basis of criteria indicating their potential to become good teachers. Selection was based on standards of quality rather than considerations of financial need.

The following summer, with the help of stipends of up to \$2,500, Fellows engaged in self-selected projects, lasting about seven weeks, that were related to teaching. During the summer and through their senior years, Fellows were supervised by mentors of their own choosing who received stipends of \$1,500 and who provided guidance on teaching as a career.

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.** Upon graduation with a bachelor's degree and acceptance into a one- or two-year graduate teacher preparation program, Fellows were awarded stipends of \$6,000 a year for full-time graduate work.

**TEACHING.** Fellows who had completed their master's degrees and had begun their work as certified classroom teachers in public schools were assisted with loan repayments of up to \$1,200 annually for up to three years of continuous teaching.

**LEADERSHIP.** Starting in 1998, Fellows who had completed three years of classroom teaching or its equivalent were eligible to apply for a three-year Program for Educational Leadership. Leadership Fellows were awarded up to \$16,500 in grants to conduct projects for educational change and to participate in leadership development activities. They also received personal computers and Internet access assistance. Assigned mentors, paid by the Fund, provided guidance and encouragement.

Fellows were also brought together regularly as a group, meeting as cohorts every two years in August and twice a year as participants in the leadership program.

### POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

**A**s the fellowship program unfolded and as Fellows progressed from their undergraduate years through their entry into the teaching profession, the Fund learned a great deal about the barriers that could stand in the way of efforts to increase the numbers of minority teachers of high quality.

**BARRIERS IN RECRUITMENT.** All of the students who were awarded fellowships were qualified to enter higher paying and more prestigious professions than teaching. Deciding instead to become public school teachers required courage and independence. As a career, school teaching was not highly ranked by either faculty or students on the selective liberal arts campuses from which most of the students were recruited. Not only did the Fellows lack encouragement from within their colleges, but even their parents often discouraged them from becoming teachers, now that other professions are open to minorities. Ironically, mothers who were long-time classroom teachers themselves occasionally discouraged their daughters from following in their footsteps. Parents remembered when teaching was practically the only professional option available to minority women, and they now felt their daughters should take advantage of wider horizons and increased opportunities.

**FINANCIAL BARRIERS.** Once they decided to enter the teaching profession, Fellows faced financial barriers. Some had graduated from college already in debt for their undergraduate education. Some, despite extensive assistance from the RBF fellowship and other scholarships, still could not afford the tuition at the graduate school of their choice. Many came from large families of modest means and so could not count on financial support from parents. In fact, the Fellows themselves were often called upon to provide financial assistance to other members of their families. As a result, Fellows were sometimes forced to combine graduate school with employment or to defer graduate school in order to take a job. One Fellow, attending the Harvard Graduate School of Education, wrote, "I've had to sacrifice much for this program, even to the extent of being a live-in nanny to save room and board costs."

**GRADUATE SCHOOL BARRIERS.** Not only was the financing of graduate work a formidable barrier, but the application process itself often posed problems. Many of the



Fellows were first-generation college students, and graduate school had not been part of their plans. Although they had experienced academic success in college, they expressed doubts about being "grad school material." "If it weren't for this program, I would not have gone to graduate school," wrote a Fellow now teaching high school in Brooklyn. "I would have been working and not have even looked at the teaching profession, although I feel that this is my destiny." As undergraduates, Fellows lacked information about how to apply, where to apply, and what to expect. Even their college advisors knew very little about graduate schools of education, requirements for teacher certification, and state licensing. Once enrolled in graduate programs, Fellows found themselves among a tiny minority of students of color, sometimes far from home, and almost always lonely. If they demonstrated a particular aptitude for academic theory or research, they were likely to be pressured to enter a doctoral program rather than a public school classroom.

(Above) Alison McKenzie, River East Elementary School, New York, New York



**EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS.** Though certified by their graduate programs and licensed to teach, some Fellows found that the supposed demand for minority teachers did not always translate into actual job offers. A Mississippian described being rejected by school districts that “claimed that they are in desperate need of ‘young black males’ as teachers and role models.” Others found themselves assigned not to schools of their choice, where students were minorities, but to predominantly white schools that were under mandate to integrate their teaching staffs. Almost always, Fellows found themselves confronted with the complexities of racial issues as played out in school and community politics.

#### STRATEGIES THAT WORKED

The design of the fellowship program served remarkably well in helping participants to overcome most of these potential barriers to becoming public school teachers. The Fund also made improvements in program design as the years progressed, based on continuous feedback through reflective discussions with participants and written evaluations.



**EFFECTIVE RECRUITING STRATEGIES.** From the start it was evident that posting notices on a college bulletin board would not be sufficient. Successful recruiting depended upon sympathetic college faculty or staff who would actively reach out to students and urge them to apply to the program. Over the years, institutional ties were strengthened, and a core group of people at each college – those who acted as liaisons and mentors, as well as others committed to improving public education – began to see the program as an important opportunity to encourage and support teaching as a career. Fellows were given book bags labeled “RBF Fellows,” and this raised campus visibility for the program. In some colleges, likely candidates were spotted in their freshman or sophomore years and told of the opportunity to apply when they became juniors. The Rockefeller name reassured parents that children had been honored for choosing teaching as a career, and the RBF’s efforts to publicize the Fellows in their hometown newspapers gratified parents as well. At the Fellows’ suggestion, the Fund began to issue certificates that could be framed, and this simple device served to mark students’ entrance into the program in a more formal and meaningful way.

**ADDRESSING FINANCIAL PROBLEMS.** As mentioned above, a series of grants supported Fellows at each step on their way to success. During the summer between their junior and senior years, they received a stipend of up to \$2,500 to take the place of earnings from what might otherwise have been routine summer jobs and to enable them instead to explore the field of education through projects of their choice. During graduate school, the Fund supported Fellows with stipends each semester, totaling \$6,000 to \$9,000. Once they entered the classroom as teachers, Fellows received up to \$1,200 each year in educational loan repayment (70 percent of Fellows had received such loans) for their first three years of service. Fellows were regularly supplied at workshops and by mail with information about graduate school scholarships, and 73 percent received financial aid in addition to their loans and fellowship stipends. (Some of the scholarships awarded by the Harvard Graduate



School of Education were made possible by a separate grant from the Fund to support minority students.) Program deferrals, when requested for financial reasons, were always granted.

**GRADUATE SCHOOL SUCCESS.** A primary responsibility of mentors was to assist Fellows in choosing and applying to graduate schools. Mentors were instructed to encourage students to apply to several universities and to make sure that applications were completed and mailed on time. Since the Fellows themselves had selected their mentors, these were adults with whom students had already established positive relationships and to whom they could freely turn for much-needed advice and encouragement. During their first summer workshop, attended by both newly selected Fellows and their mentors, new Fellows participated in sessions on how to choose a graduate school and

how to apply. Lists of top-ranked programs, timetables for admission, and information about state licensing and credentialing were made available at the workshop. The Fund also wrote to schools of education for materials that could be displayed at the annual workshops and asked that recruitment information be sent directly to the Fellows. This outreach was particularly effective in helping Fellows realize that prestigious graduate schools would welcome their applications. Once Fellows had entered graduate school, they were invited to meet with new Fellows at subsequent summer workshops. Returning Fellows made presentations on various aspects of their graduate school experiences and set up counseling stations to offer one-on-one advice about specific university programs. Hearing other minority students describe their graduate school experiences was tremendously reassuring to undergraduates.

**SUPPORTING BEGINNING TEACHERS.** Beginning teachers were also invited back to summer workshops attended by incoming Fellows and by those in graduate school, following a pattern of having cohorts return at two-year intervals. Time was allotted at each workshop for new teachers to meet separately and compare their experiences. They were also asked to prepare a presentation for the Fellows still in graduate school on how to find a job in teaching



and what to expect as a beginner. The Fund also set up computer networks for each cohort of Fellows as well as for the group as a whole. This promoted the exchange of information about



teaching, job searches, and the challenges of being a minority teacher. After three years of teaching, Fellows were eligible to apply for the Program for Educational Leadership.

**PROVIDING CONTINUING SUPPORT.** When fellowship candidates were first brought to the Fund’s offices for personal interviews, the educators who questioned them looked for students who showed dedication to the goal of teaching and determination to succeed. Nevertheless, Fellows were subject to self-doubt and lack of confidence. “At times I feel alone and almost crazy,” wrote one,

“because I believe in something that others usually belittle and talk down.” To counteract these fears, the program offered continual encouragement. Fellows were repeatedly given the opportunity to meet adults who were eager to help them. The RBF staff was always on call for assistance and developed ongoing friendships with many of the Fellows. The most valuable support, however, came from other Fellows. The summer workshops, where Fellows met each other repeatedly face-to-face, provided a basis for friendship and trust and resulted in a prized and reassuring solidarity.

#### THE VALUE OF MINORITY TEACHERS

As Fellows moved into public school classrooms, they were asked to fill out brief questionnaires about their teaching experiences. Although the Fund had its own opinions about the value of increasing the number of minority teachers in public schools, staff wanted to know how the Fellows viewed themselves. When asked what they considered their “greatest strengths” in the classroom, Fellows most often focused on the quality of their relationship to their students. The Fellows had attended outstanding graduate programs in education and were thoroughly grounded in pedagogy, subject matter, and curriculum, yet they did not cite these as their areas of “greatest strength.” Instead, they attributed their success to their abilities to understand the students they teach – “relating,” “analyzing,” “helping,” “developing,” and “believing in each child.” Although no comparable data exist for other teachers, it seems clear that the Fellows’ responses reflect a particular set of values they bring to the classroom.

Surprisingly, the second most common answer to the question about strengths was “patience.” This may reflect the difficulties that Fellows, eager to effect change, have encountered in their schools. As young, beginning teachers who also described themselves as having “energy,” “enthusiasm,” and “lots of ideas,” they may be particularly aware of how much patience is required to adjust to the realities of their school settings. It may also be that they view patience as a necessary underpinning of teaching in today’s classrooms, along with the “dedication,” “caring,” “empathy,” “flexibility,” and “giving of myself” which they mentioned as well.

A number of the Fellows answered in a way that one hopes could be true for all teachers everywhere. They wrote that their greatest strength was simply “loving what I do.” ■

(From left) Jane I. Soo Hoo, Grazide School, Hacienda Heights, California

Christie Cooley, Dean Rusk Elementary School, Atlanta, Georgia

Crystal A. Cooper, William Ramsay Elementary School, Alexandria, Virginia

Nadirah Moreland, Oakland Technical High School, Oakland, California

Edward W.O. Perez, Bassett High School, La Puente, California

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Designed and Produced for the Rockefeller Brothers Fund by  
Jessica Weber Design Inc/NYC  
Eric Neuner

Printed by Rosemont Press Inc.

The book is set in Adobe Bauer Bodoni.

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