President's Newsletter

FROM MISSION COLLEGE... TO GROUND ZERO

As educators, we try to prepare our students for the future and the "real world" by giving them skills and knowledge, and passing along to them as much of the accumulated experience of mankind as possible. But no matter how hard we may try, there will always be events that cannot be prepared for, or anticipated. The terrorist attacks on the East Coast were such events.

I would like to devote the balance of my column to this remarkable letter we received from Eddie Martinez, who graduated from Mission College last May and is now a student at Parsons School of Design in Manhattan – located just blocks from “ground zero.”

SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 - MANHATTAN, NEW YORK

I was in class finishing a critique when our department chair walked in and said that the World Trade Center had just collapsed, and that the Pentagon was bombed. I looked to my left and saw tears in my friend Sarah’s eyes. About a dozen kids and I ran outside to see the view from 6th Ave. My campus is walking distance from the Financial District so I could see, smell, feel, and hear everything that was happening. Black smoke covered the sky for hours. People crowded around car stereos with tears in their eyes, listening for every bit of news. There were lines around payphones as people tried to contact family. Fortunately, I managed to call my frantic mother and let her know I was still alive.

Later, I sat in a café with some friends, listening to updates and waiting to hear from Parsons about what was going to happen next. All the students had been evacuated from my dorm, which was only three blocks from the attacks, and we would later sleep in classrooms. Our school administration handled the situation extremely well. They knew that we were all just kids, far from home and very afraid. They quickly fed us, and gave the best accommodations available under the circumstances. After we were taken care of, they mobilized the campus as an emergency center for St. Vincent’s Hospital, which handled most of the victims.

That night I needed to get out. We all did. As I walked outside the campus, I could “taste” the air. It smelled like a mixture of burnt tire and ammonia. There was still ash flying in the sky above me. I took a walk to Union Square Park, just a few blocks away. I saw about 50 college-aged students sitting and talking – trying to make sense of the whole situation. A few of them were spreading out butcher’s paper on the ground and passing out markers. Others were making homemade candles and giving them to those who passed. There was such an intense feeling of grief. I felt it must have embodied the anguish that all of New York felt that night. I didn’t know then that over the next few days Union Square would become the hub for mourners from all the five boroughs.

Gusty winds did not dampen spirits at the Honors Reception held this month for more than 700 Mission College students and their families. Students were recognized for making the Dean’s Honors List by maintaining grade point averages of 3.5 or higher. Those who have made the dean’s list for three consecutive semesters were recognized for making the President’s Honors List. In photo above, student (and college employee!) Vera Garcia accepts congratulations from President Adriana D. Barrera.

MISSION COLLEGE has acquired 300 new “direct inward dial” lines which have a prefix different from the college’s 364-7600 series.

The new series runs from 833-3300 through 833-3599. On campus, you can dial the new number series by using the last four digits. Dialing into the college from outside, you must dial the 833 prefix, plus the last four digits. The call goes directly to that line.

The new numbers are being assigned as needed, according to administrative services.
Assemblyman Tony Cardenas recently gave Mission College students his insights on the state budget, legislative procedure and other civic issues during a series of lectures to instructor John Morales’ Chicano Studies classes. Morales arranged the classroom visits so that his students could hear firsthand how things work in the state Legislature. Cardenas, chairman of the Assembly Budget Committee, represents the 39th District, based in the northeast San Fernando Valley.

Former student Farisa Morales keeps a busy schedule these days, seeing to a family that includes a five- and a seven-year-old, attending UCLA during the day…and, in the afternoons, plotting and analyzing trajectories to Mars. Morales is a member of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory’s Space Experiments Systems and Technology Division. Now a senior at UCLA, Morales is within reach of her B.S. degree in astrophysics. An internship at JPL in 2000 turned into a part-time job, full-time during the summers. She is also involved in research that JPL hopes will lead to the launch of a cryobot probe to Europa, one of Jupiter’s moons, later this decade. Morales, who attended Mission from 1997-99, credits former instructor Richard Rains with helping develop her interest and skills in science and physics.

Longtime faculty member John Klistner has been named Mission College’s athletics director. Klistner will lay the groundwork this year for the return of a limited sports program to Mission College in the 2002-03 school year. Klistner previously served as the college’s athletic director until budget cuts forced an end to the sports program in 1997.

Mission College culinary arts student Cindy Schwanke has been awarded a $500 scholarship by the Roundtable for Women in Food Service. The award was recently presented to Schwanke at a meeting of the organization. Schwanke, who is working toward her Associate’s degree in culinary arts, served an internship at Spago’s Restaurant, where she worked with an executive chef.

Multimedia instructor Lucy Griesbach participated in an art exhibition in Yokohama, Japan, entitled, “Suitcase II: Travelogue.” The premise was that artists from around the world would travel to Yokohama and could only exhibit art that fit inside a suitcase. Griesbach created a multitude of miniature suitcases out of other people’s vacation photos, which were sewn together. “In effect, I created suitcases out of the visual reminders or memories that people have of their trips and then displayed the photo-suitcases within another suitcase.”

Eddie later wrote to tell us he has resumed his studies, and reports that he has been awarded a scholarship in graphic design from the Worldstudio Foundation*. His goal is to start a media-film center for underprivileged youth, after graduating from Parsons.

I believe that Eddie embodies our nation’s present state. From witnessing and surviving the very worst in human experience, he is returning to the kinds of goals and endeavors that have made this, a great nation.


The days that followed evolved into new, assorted events that created an altered sense of normalcy. For a week I was “homeless.” I stayed with friends I knew in the Bronx, or slept in my family. I had only acquaintances to call as friends. Even then, trying to talk about the event was almost morbid. I wish that I could say that I took the whole event in stride, but I can’t. I still am not sure how this whole event will affect my life from now…but I know I’ll never be the same again.

(Letter continues…)

Eddie Martinez