

I met Miguel* when he entered my multigrade classroom in the middle of the school year, flanked by his older brother Juan and two younger sisters, Carmen and Maria. His mother trailed behind, anxiously looking to her children for a response when I addressed her in English.

It became apparent, after a few basic tests, that although Miguel was 10 years old, he would be joining my 2nd-grade class. The fact that his classmates were younger and smaller than him made no difference to Miguel, who settled into his desk, all smiles, eagerly grasping the brightly colored reader that I handed him.

As the weeks went by, I discovered that Miguel had lived in Mexico, Texas, and Florida before joining my class in Massachusetts. He had weeded crops, harvested fruit, and taken in what education he could, gratefully. He lived with his mother, older brother, two older sisters, their babies (four in all), and the two younger sisters. Of his father, he never spoke.

Miguel's enthusiasm in the classroom was rivaled by only one thing—his enthusiasm for

“Trying to Get the Bad Out”

Pathfinders. Arriving early each Tuesday evening, he eagerly sought to help, setting up chairs, arranging flags, and passing out songbooks, his face radiating excitement.

When the director of the club announced a weekend camping trip in the fall, Miguel could scarcely contain himself. For weeks, he spoke of nothing else. He arrived at the church parking lot, early as usual, with a worn satchel and one thin blanket.

For two days, Miguel relished every waking moment. He scrubbed spaghetti off a pot with as much enthusiasm as he bounced a ball in the game of 4-Square. He put his tent in order for inspection as happily as he arranged his collection of rocks and leaves for a display.

At night, making the final rounds, I discovered him quietly shivering in his corner of the tent, his lone blanket wrapped tightly about him. I found an extra sleeping bag, zipped him up, and patted his thick, straight locks. “Thank you,” he said simply, and although it was dark, I knew his eyes were shining.

By Sandra Doran

With the end of the campout came a return to our regular Tuesday Pathfinder meetings, leathercraft, stories, and knot-tying. As one meeting came to a close late in December, a group of our older boys wandered out of the fellowship hall. Moments later, I heard the sound of hurried feet running up the basement steps. A door slammed, and the boys ran outside, breathless. A trip down to the basement revealed a can of spray paint minus its cap and a four-letter word brazenly decorating the storage room wall.

We quickly re-assembled the club and demanded the facts. Who, we wanted to know, would dare do such a thing? Feet shuffled, nervous glances were exchanged, and fingers tapped the sides



“Miguel?” I asked softly.
 “Was it you?”

He nodded.
 “But why?”

He took a deep breath and turned his eyes toward mine. “My dad died last night, and I was trying to get the bad out.”

I held him as he wept. It seemed as if all the evil in the universe were breaking out of his small frame with every shuddering sob.

I never saw Miguel again. I heard that he was not allowed to attend his father’s funeral. I heard that the family moved again, this time someplace out West where Miguel could once again take his place in the fields.

In 20 years, I have not forgotten my eager student, nor the lesson he taught me. Whenever I am tempted to chastise a student for a senseless act, rush in and accuse when a wrong is done, I remember the words choked out between heart-rending sobs on that darkened stairwell. “My dad died last night, and I was trying to get the bad out.” How many others, I wonder, caught in acts of school destruction, defiance of rules, ill-spoken words, are searching for a way to “get the bad out”? For Miguel’s sake, I have resolved to listen. ☺

of metal chairs. The clock ticked out the time. No one volunteered any information.

We took the children out of the room, one at a time, and questioned them. Still nothing. And then, finally, as car headlights began to signal rides home, a hand went up.

“It was Miguel,” whispered our informer, and then his head dropped.

“Miguel?” I searched the room

for his smiling denial, but noticed that Miguel was missing. “It is not fair to accuse someone just because he is not present.”

Unbelieving still, I left the room, determined to find Miguel. He was not outside, not in the other classroom. Finally, my sweeping gaze rested upon him, seated on the first-floor stairwell. He looked up, as if he had been waiting for me.

*All names have been changed.



Sandra Doran, Ed.D., is an associate superintendent of education for the Florida Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Winter Park, Florida.