

First & Last Name: Brenda Pacheco

Anticipated Graduation Date & College: May 2021/Texas A&M San Antonio

Educational, Career & Personal Goals: After I receive my degree I plan to be active in my community. I want to volunteer to help children learn to read who are not reading at grade level. I have already informed the administrators at the school where I worked for a short time that I will be back.

My educational journey: Recently I applied for a scholarship and was asked to submit an essay. Below is what I wrote. I think this says it all.

In the eyes of the world's richest and most powerful people my achievements may appear to be small. Personal achievements and direct contributions I have made to the community where I live I believe are priceless.

You see, I know that I was created to make a difference in the area where I grew up. I am sixty-two years of age and over the years have volunteered hundreds of hours to assist a variety of non-profit groups. My real passion however, is teaching young children and teens how to read. The most important words I say to young people these days is "if you can't read (and read well) you can't do anything"! So I made it my personal mission to help children/students learn to read and expand their vocabulary.

My parents were both uneducated. No framed high school diplomas hung on our walls. When I was a child they were not aware that they should buy me books or other materials to read at home. At about age five I began attempting to read street signs and highway billboards as my parents drove around town. The words I didn't know I looked up in a dictionary that my dad "borrowed" from his workplace. Fast forward to adulthood.

Cousins were being born and if they were struggling to learn how to read I spent countless hours tutoring them. I was determined that no children of my bloodline would ever fail a reading class. I would take them to the local library to get a library card before they could even provide a signature.

After retirement I chose to work at a school where most of the students are Hispanic. I was saddened to find that the majority did not read at grade level. I shared my concern and passion with administration and was allowed to work with students during their advisory class. At the end of the school year 95% percent of my students had raised their reading levels by two grades.

To the editors of Time Magazine that may mean nothing. To the students in my "hood" it means that they will go forward and have the ability to read and understand an employment application. It means that they will someday be able to read to their small children and in turn encourage them to read. It means that when they are completing their college applications they will understand all of the questions.

My advice to someone thinking about returning to college: You can't even imagine the number of women who have told me (since I returned to college) that they wish they could go back to school. My response is always "you can". Anybody can, if they go to CafeCollege and Upgrade, ask for help. I can't begin to tell you how incredibly helpful and encouraging the entire staff has been on my journey back to college. The staff always answers the questions I have and are willing to explain and review any documents or assignments I am having difficulty with. They are compassionate and I can tell they really

care about my success. I probably would have given up if it weren't for the staff's help. I am having the "time of my life" as an older returning student.

