

Letters to the Editor

November 8, 2008

Join in the effort to inspire our youth, halt violence

I grew up in the barrio of East LA. I slept in a dresser drawer in a one-bedroom bachelor apartment that housed my whole family. My story is far too common. It is the story of thousands of Latino and minority kids who have become entangled in barrio and ghetto life, typically told that they'll always live a life of gang violence and drugs.

Although living in the midst of gang violence where drugs were common, I escaped the fate that befell many of my so-called friends. I am now a successful author and businessman, and I'm using my experience to change lives and to break this vicious cycle of poverty and violence.

It is our responsibility to work together to stop the violence and give our kids the inspiration they need to chase the American dream, or, at the very least, to feel safe in their homes and their communities.

With one senseless murder after another, we have to ask ourselves, why is it happening so often? And why here in our backyards? Violence is a symptom. Excessive violence, like what we're seeing in our communities, is an epidemic. We need to find a cure before more innocent lives are lost.

When I put my story to paper this past year, my goal was to help other people avoid the detours I took on my road to a better life. Frustrated with the increase in violence, drug abuse, and school failure among our youth, I, along with friends and colleagues, have started The Barrio Making a Difference Challenge, with the goal of reaching out to at least 1 million underprivileged and at-risk youth. I have donated more than 2,000 copies of my book to groups and organizations with at-risk kids and adults.

The Oberweis Foundation donated funds to the East Aurora School District to purchase another 1,000 copies for students.

This story is being used by teachers, school administrators, organizations, political leaders, law enforcement, and most importantly, the kids in and around Aurora and Chicago. Unfortunately, there are still too many young people in need of help, so many lives we need to touch.

So here is my challenge to you: Please use your knowledge, experience, wisdom and contacts to pave the way for young people to discover a brighter future. Please join me. Reach out to a youngster. It does take a community to raise a child, but just one person can make a big difference. How will you?

Together we will stop the violence.

Robert Renteria
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