

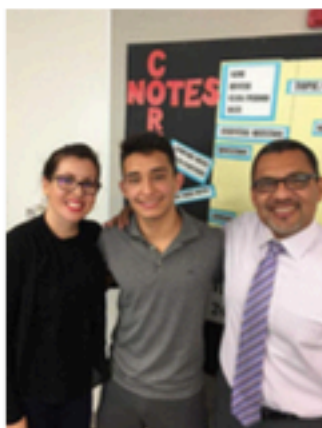


## ***SALUTING SUPER SOUTH HEROES, 2018***

### ***New Year's Edition***



#### **JOHN C. FREMONT HIGH SCHOOL**



When he was six years old, Dario Henriquez's grandfather sat him down for a talk.

"I shouldn't be telling you this," he confided. "Life is not easy, Dario. Your parents are away and your grandmother and I are old. There is only so much we can do for you, and soon we will be gone. Keep this in mind: we love you. Have a goal in life and try your best. We want to see you rise to a high position, and you can do it. But remember, it will not be easy."

(Pictured from left to right: Virginia Enriquez, Dario Henriquez, and Luis Montoya)

While **Dario Henriquez** respected his grandfather's words, life had already taught him their message--life is hard. Born in El Salvador into poverty, left by his parents, and physically and emotionally mistreated by his aunt, Dario had endured a lifetime's misfortunes before his grandparents assumed his guardianship.

But it didn't get any easier from there.

His grandparents' home offered him love, stability and an appreciation for education and learning. School, however, was a different matter.

El Salvador is notorious for its gangs.

On and off-campus, gang members menaced Dario. He became a target. First occasionally, then frequently. Just as one such encounter threatened to escalate to violence, Dario's school principal arrived and his tormentors scattered.

“He saved me,” Dario says. “But I wasn’t really safe. I knew I had to leave to be safe.”

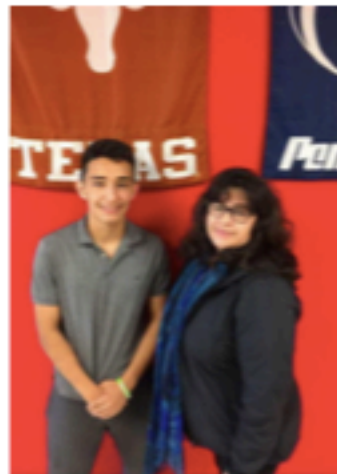
He told his grandfather about what had been happening and how he feared for his safety. Dario told his grandfather that he needed to leave El Salvador. He wanted to go to the United States and try to reunite with his parents.

It was arranged.

By car, by bus, by truck, and by foot Dario made his way out of El Salvador into Guatemala through Mexico to Monterey and finally across to McAllen, Texas.

That story is too tortuous to relate adequately here, but, happily, it concludes with Dario being awarded asylum status into the United States and a change of residence to Los Angeles.

(Seen right: Dario Henriquez, Rosa Thornton; ELD teacher)



In Los Angeles, Dario was reunited with his mother, who enrolled him in **Fremont High School (Luis Montoya, Principal)**. He was a fourteen-year old high school freshman, and he didn’t speak a word of English—not even “survival English.”

A year later, he has mastered conversational English, tested at grade level in English reading comprehension, and earned a 3.8 GPA. How did he do it?

“I practiced,” Dario says. “I spoke to the little kids in my neighborhood. They spoke Spanish to me at first, but slowly they added English words when we talked. After a while, we only spoke English, so I talked to them every chance I got.”

In fact, he spoke with anyone who would listen. He spoke to his fellow English learners in Rosa Thornton’s class; he spoke to teachers; he spoke to children in the neighborhood, and, most daringly, he spoke to students who spoke *only English*. Dario thinks there is a lesson there for other English learners.

“Sometimes people are afraid when they are learning a new language, afraid to make mistakes, afraid people will laugh at them. Don’t be afraid. People may laugh, but ignore them, keep going. You will move on, and they will stay where they are.”

Dario thanks his teacher, **Rosa Thornton, Virginia Enriquez—Fremont’s EL coach**, and **Principal Montoya** for supporting and reassuring him—helping him to prosper where so many others have struggled. And, of course, Dario is grateful to his grandfather who serves as a daily source of inspiration.

Dario’s father and grandfather were policemen in El Salvador, but Dario aspires to become an FBI agent. Recalling his grandfather’s words, Dario explains why.

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“I was a police officer, but I want you to do even better—way better. You have a good brain, you can do it. You know the path you have to follow. Rise to a high position. You can do it. Make me proud. Make us all proud.”

**LELAND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

Organizing a field trip can be onerous, and the arts are not tested on high-stakes exams, so, some might ask, why would a principal arrange a field trip to the ballet for 1,300 kids?