

# FDEA Student Success Essay Contest



## Who I Am

By Herixdaniel Gonzalez

I am a 37-year-old male of Puerto Rican descent, born in a poor section of New York. Being poor and part of a minority has helped make me a more compassionate member of society and work harder to change my status about being poor and not let it dictate who I will become. When I was two months old, my mother took me to Puerto Rico to visit her family; while there, I contracted polio. This left me sentenced to a wheel chair for thirteen years and affected the right side of my brain, as well as my right arm and leg. My mother fed me through a tube, which was traumatic for her; however, we had a wonderful and magical relationship.

My father, a Vietnam veteran, had issues with drug addiction. When I was twelve, my life changed dramatically. My parents were arrested for illegal drug activity, and my grandfather took custody of my brother and me. He was a tough New York Puerto Rican, rude, firm, not well-educated, but wise. I was angry and hard to deal with, so he sent me to Puerto Rico to my step-grandmother's house. She and her family were the cruelest people I had met in my short life. She did not send me to school because she felt it a waste of time; therefore, seventh grade was my last formal schooling. She made me work long hours on her farm instead; my only friends were the animals in the barn where I had to stay.

After seven years, I moved back to New York and then Miami. I had many jobs dishwasher, chef assistant, Home Depot, Dade County Schools, bar tending, gardening, and mechanics. In October 2005 I received news that my only brother was killed in Iraq. That day my whole world collapsed and my soul tore apart. Because life's circumstances had tom us apart, I never had the chance to tell him how much I loved him.

From devastation, I shifted my life to pursue happiness and help others. In June 2008, I got my GED from Miami-Dade college. I was afraid of school in the beginning but found wonderful people in the GED lab; they provided me with the tools I needed to complete my GED. In 2009 I began taking credit courses. This is where I have met wonderful angels who are patient, smart, and dedicated to helping me succeed.

At Miami-Dade College, I have a 3.84 GPA, volunteer as a note taker and tutor for ACCESS students, am president of the Diverse Student Organization, and in 2010 earned the Presidential Award for volunteering over 100 hours. As a student at Miami-Dade, my life has changed dramatically, and I have surpassed my expectations as I continue to pursue my happiness. I see this college as a safe place where age, background, language, culture, or race are never obstacles to succeed and where dynamic and dedicated teachers and staff make a wonderful environment in which to grow.