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Rhode Island College Upward Bound
1980-1982



“This is the greatest lesson a child can learn. It is the greatest lesson anyone can learn. It has been the greatest lesson I have learned: if you persevere, stick with it, work at it, you have a real opportunity to achieve something. Sure, there will be storms along the way. And you might not reach your goal right away. But if you do your best and keep a true compass, you’ll get there.”

Edward M. Kennedy, *True Compass: A Memoir*

In September 2008 I was fortunate enough to meet United States Senator Edward M. Kennedy. The Senator and I were presented with the Distinguished Community Champion Award by Progreso Latino. We spoke for only about twenty minutes, but that conversation will be with me forever. When I first read this quote I could not help but wonder if he was speaking about me.

Central Falls is the most economically disadvantaged city in Rhode Island. The poverty rate is high and the graduation rate is low. This is where I grew up and very little has changed since. As a kid I would hike out onto the littered dangerous streets and always tell myself that I would leave this callous place and never return. 10 years ago I returned to Central Falls and opened the city’s only law office. It seems that my “true compass” pointed me to where I needed to be.

The principles and values I learned as a student, Tutor Counselor, and now a mentor for the Upward Bound program are the foundations which guide my “true compass”. I wasn’t the best student but I persevered. I wasn’t the most committed student but I stuck with it. I wasn’t the smartest but I worked at it and I achieved my goals. Along the way there was always my Upward Bound family.

24 years ago I married my beautiful bride and we have 3 wonderful children. The best man at my wedding was also the first person I met at Upward Bound some 30 years ago. Our friendship has endured and we often reminisce of how we met so long ago.

Intrigued by our tales and adventures my daughter sought to enroll in Upward Bound as a high school student. Sadly, and ironically, we live in an affluent suburb where the school district does not offer this magnificent program. After being told by a callous guidance counselor that the program was for disadvantaged children my daughter came home perplexed. “Dad, what’s so great about being disadvantaged?” At that moment I could not help but thinking that my children may be a truly disadvantaged child.

Upward Bound offered me the opportunity to leave the confines of the inner city. The opportunity to enjoy lifelong friendships and to experience people and places that I thought were beyond my reach. Upward Bound taught me that I can be and do anything I dared. The program gave me “*a real opportunity to achieve something...*” Upward Bound gave me my true compass.

Not being one to be denied, as a college student herself, my daughter signed up to be a tutor counselor for two summers. I often hear her reminisce with the friends she made during those two summers. She has attended many graduations for her former students and meets with them when they find themselves in need of a friend. Her experience with the program has helped her true compass and she readily admits that she would have truly been disadvantaged had she not experienced the program.

I am forever grateful to Mariam Boyajian, Anthony “Chip” Cipolla, Rhode Island College Student Support Services, and, of course, the rest of the Upward Bound Family. Thru the years, not only have they helped me keep my true compass, but have allowed me the opportunity to help others weather their storms.

As our meeting came to a close the Senior Senator from Massachusetts leaned in and asked me if I enjoyed sailing. When I told him that I had never been he looked at me and said, “Sure you have, sure you have.”