

# **A Special Gift**

## **Journey to Excellence**

**By  
Rob McBride**



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Rob will be happy to meet with your organization, group or school to inspire excellence, enhance productivity and improve morale by discussing the principles presented in A Special Gift

Read a "Reflection" a day to keep the blues away  
and make your own way!

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1. Action
2. Tenacity
3. Tolerance
4. Initiative
5. Temperance
6. Usefulness
7. Desire
8. Energy
9. Confidence

## *Dedication*

*To my Mother and my Father who have been with me  
spiritually, emotionally and physically every  
step of the way on this wonderful journey  
we call life and who have each  
encouraged me to find my  
own Special Gift*

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## A Special Gift



### I. Juan José

**J**uan José, like all fourteen year old boys, had his dreams and desires. People called him “bones” because no matter how much he ate, he always remained thin. He had curly black hair and eyes which shined like stars when he was excited. He always felt uneasy when women commented about his long, elegant eyelashes because he always related long eyelashes with women. One day he went so far as to cut them and was surprised when they grew right back again. He was extremely curious, always playing tricks and making up games. Everybody loved his ability to say something funny, even in the most difficult of circumstances.

He was born and raised in a neighborhood called the 24<sup>th</sup> of June, which was named after an important and decisive battle in his country’s quest for independence almost 200 years ago. It was a five

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minute walk climbing concrete stairs which wound up from the main street below to where he lived in the middle of The Capitol, the largest city in the country. Juan José always ran up and down the stairs two at a time very quickly. People always told him, "Be careful, boy, you are going to kill yourself!"

Life in the 24<sup>th</sup> of June was very difficult. Juan José had grown up with sadness and poverty his entire life. He lived in a tiny one bedroom apartment with one bathroom, a living room and a small kitchen together with his mother María Consuelo, his two brothers José Gregorio and José Antonio as well as with his sister María José. His mother and María José slept in the bedroom while Juan José slept with his two older brothers in the living room which converted into a second bedroom every night. His father José María had gone to work one day two years before and never returned. He had magically disappeared and they hadn't heard from him since. They didn't know if he had left willingly or one of the gang members from the neighborhood had taken his life.

José María, like the majority of the people in the neighborhood, had economic difficulties. He had borrowed money from a gang to resolve a financial problem they had with their other apartment which was slightly bigger and had two bedrooms and two bathrooms. He hired a lawyer to make payment through the legal system with the hope they could keep their apartment. Unfortunately, it had all been a trick and they lost the apartment anyway. One of the saddest days of Juan José's life was the day they were evicted from their home. Nevertheless, the gang wanted its money.

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Juan José was very sad after his father disappeared. He had wonderful memories of the times he and his father had played baseball. Since he was a little boy he had dreamed about being a famous player in the big leagues. His father had told him all about the wonders of David Concepción. Juan José's idol, however, was Andrés Galarraga. The story of a poor kid getting to the big leagues was well known in his neighborhood. He followed the careers of his favorite players with great interest and enthusiasm.

Juan José couldn't believe his father would have left willingly. During the nights after his father's disappearance, his mother cried inconsolably while Juan José would hold and comfort her.

"Take it easy, mommy, you are the most beautiful person in the world," Juan José would tell her lovingly. "I'm sure dad will be back to take us to live in one of those magnificent houses where the rich people live just like you have always dreamed about. He probably got a better job and will be back for us soon."

María Consuelo adored her son. He was her youngest child and, while she deeply loved all of her children, Juan José always held a special place in her heart. All of her children gave her a kiss and asked for her blessing whenever they would leave or come home. In addition to the kiss, Juan José would give her a big hug that would take her breath away, the kind of hug that fills your body with intense love and energy.

In the beginning, Juan José believed his father would return although now he feared he never would. He couldn't believe his father would leave them penniless and in the midst of being evicted from their home. Nevertheless, the days, months and years passed. Little by little

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his father became a distant memory. In the meantime, Juan José's entire family had to work hard every day to make ends meet.

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## II. Work

**J**uan José stopped going to school when he was twelve years old, shortly after his father left home. He found a job delivering newspapers in the streets of The Capitol. He was able to buy some of the food which they so desperately needed with the little money he made each day.

Like most adolescents, he had his doubts, frustrations and dreams. He saw two possibilities in life. One option was that of the gangs who were always getting into trouble. He saw they were always drinking alcohol, doing drugs and, in general, causing trouble. While they wore the best clothes and always had money, they were always running from the law.

The other option was to find a steady job working from early morning until late at night. He knew many people in this category who

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appeared to make just enough money to get by. Even then, it seemed as if they never had enough.

On the one hand, he wanted all of the material things the gang members had, and, at the same time, knew this meant living in constant danger. Frequently, the gang members would die violent deaths in one of the many dead-end streets in his neighborhood. One day one of the gangs had taken the life of one of his closest friends. His friend, who had saved his money for six months to buy a pair of tennis shoes he had dreamed about, left a party one weekend and was jumped by the gang who stole his shoes and killed him without so much as a second thought when he fought back.

Juan José wanted to do something useful with his life for himself and, more importantly, for his mother. He saw how she suffered daily. She worked in a cloth factory located on the outskirts of the Capitol which required she get up at 5:00 A.M. to get to work on time. She normally wouldn't return until after 8:00 P.M. When she arrived home she was exhausted. Juan José's mother was beautiful and could easily pass for being ten years younger. Nevertheless, Juan José saw the toll the last two years without her husband had taken on her. The energy she used to have had been replaced by constant weariness. While her eyes still sparkled when she spoke, her face now started to show wrinkles and she frequently had shadows under her eyes from lack of sleep.

When María Consuelo got home she would fix something to eat for everyone and then as they ate, she would watch a soap opera which started at 9:00 P.M. During this time Juan José felt most at peace with his family and his life.

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One day Juan José got up and went to pick up his newspapers at work. When he arrived at the corner where he picked up the papers, there was no one. Normally, there was a truck which would arrive very early to deliver the papers and it was nowhere in sight. His co-workers began arriving one by one. The newspapers didn't arrive and nobody knew why. One hour later his boss arrived.

"I hate to tell you," he began, "your work here with the paper is finished. It's no secret to anyone we have had difficulty getting the raw materials for the paper and the economic situation in the country has been exceptionally difficult. The owner of the newspaper has decided to shut down the business after fifty years of operation. It's difficult to say whether we will open for business at some time in the future. What I can tell you for sure is right now we are all out on the street!"

Juan José didn't know what to do. He knew his mother and his family depended on the money he took home every day. He felt helpless and wanted to cry when he thought about what he would tell his mother, not so much because she would be upset with him, rather because of the poverty which followed them every step of the way.

He began wandering through the streets and felt as if he were in a dream. As he walked the streets, full of people and noise, he felt isolated, absent, as if in a trance. He had the sensation of being in a tunnel where everything was distant and silent. He arrived at a plaza where he had been many times with his family and sat down on a bench. He put his head in his hands and began to cry shamelessly.



### III. Pappy

Juan José didn't know if five minutes or one hour had passed when he felt a hand on his shoulder. He lifted his head and saw an older man with gray hair and a long beard.

"It's all right to cry, son," said the man with a resonant and eloquent voice. "Tears cleanse the soul."

Juan José put his head in his hands once again and continued to cry. He sobbed and felt his shoulders rise and fall beneath the strong hand of the man. They remained for several minutes without saying a word. When Juan José felt no more tears would come, he lifted his head once more and looked at the man. His face was wrinkled and his gray eyes smiled with confidence and security.

"What's wrong, son, why do you cry so?" The old man inquired.

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In spite of all of the warnings Juan José's mother had given him about speaking with strangers, he had no fear of this man. Juan José told him about his work at the newspaper and the old man listened attentively. When he stopped talking, the man looked at him and smiled.

“Life consists of ups and downs. The most important thing is to be able to get up after having fallen.”

“I'm not sure what you are trying to tell me,” Juan José responded.

“Do you have time to talk?”

“Now I do,” said the boy with a slight smile. “Now I have all the time in the world!”

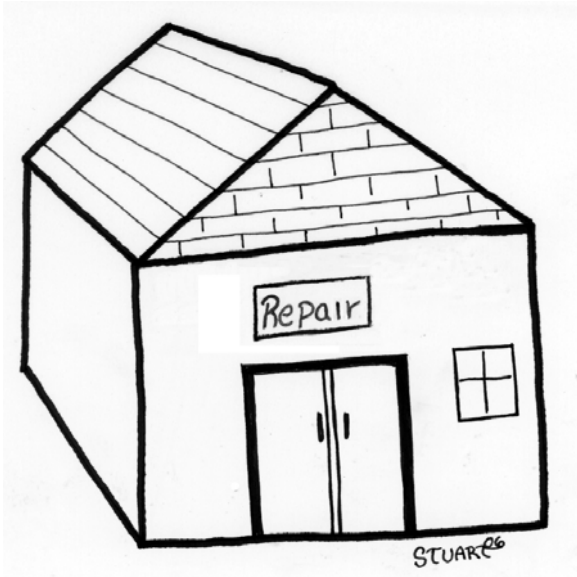
The old man laughed loudly and the boy looked at him with surprise.

“Excuse me, what's so funny?”

“Time is golden and each moment we have is a gift. We should never waste it. This instant turns into the seconds, minutes, hours and days of our lives. When we are young, we think we have all the time in the world. When we are old, we feel we have no time. In reality, time is the same for everyone regardless of age. Time is relative and the only thing we have for sure is this instant.” Juan José thought about what he had heard. He nodded in agreement with what the old man had said.

“What's your name?” Juan José wanted to know.

“That's a very good question,” he said with a grin. “I am known by many names, though my friends call me ‘Pappy.’”



#### IV. Pacheco

“Let me tell you a story,” continued Pappy, “perhaps it can help you understand the cycles of life. There once was a man named Pacheco who worked in a factory as a watchman. He didn’t like the job much because the hours were terrible. He worked 24 hours straight and then had 24 hours of rest.”

“I know a man who works that way,” commented Juan José.

“Since he lived far away from work, Pacheco would get up very early in order to avoid traffic and arrive in time to relieve his co-worker. He had worked this way for twelve years.

“One day the plant manager came to him and told him they had hired an efficiency expert. He explained a new procedure for visitors which required the watchman check their identification, write down their name and the name of the person they were visiting.

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“While appearing to be a simple request, Pacheco explained he couldn’t comply. He explained to his boss that he didn’t know how to read or write. The manager told Pacheco, ‘In that case, I have to let you go. The plant has spent a lot of money on the study and we have to follow their suggestions to the letter.’”

“That doesn’t seem fair! Especially when he had worked there for so long!” exclaimed Juan José.

“Life is neither fair nor unfair,” continued Pappy. “Long ago my father told me, ‘Life is neither fair nor unfair, it just is.’”

“Pacheco went home and shamefully told his family what had taken place. His family was distraught with the news. He considered his alternatives. Initially, what seemed most logical was to look for another job as a watchman. After all, it was what he knew how to do and what he had done his whole life. He knew when someone went to apply for a job, future employers always asked about experience.

“I have noticed people normally continue with a similar occupation even when they are fired from a job,” Juan José reflected.

“That’s right, son. Normally, people continue in their same occupation. In this case, however, Pacheco asked himself a very important question, ‘What is it I really like to do?’ He immediately knew the answer. He loved to fix things. In fact, since he was a kid, he always liked to take everything apart to see how it worked. His family and friends always gave him all kinds of things to fix.

“The next morning a friend came to talk to Pacheco. They spoke about what had happened at the factory. Since the friend knew Pacheco liked to fix things, he told him he had a radio which needed fixing and he would be willing to pay Pacheco if he could fix it.

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Pacheco accepted the challenge and in less than twenty minutes had fixed it. His friend paid him and left. Suddenly, Pacheco had an idea. ‘How about if I look for things to fix and charge according to what people are able to pay?’ He explained the idea to his wife and she loved it.”

“What a wonderful idea!” said Juan José.

“That same day,” Pappy went on, “Pacheco went with his wife through the entire neighborhood and asked people if they needed to have anything fixed. Because of the difficult economic situation, people often didn’t have enough money to buy something new, so they preferred to fix what they already had. The very first day, they got two irons, three picture frames, a table and a television to fix. He got right to work and by the next day Pacheco succeeded in fixing everything except the television which he left for the next day. Everyone was pleased with how quickly he had finished.

“They paid him and in some cases gave him more things to fix. Pacheco didn’t know what was wrong with the television so he went to see a friend who knew a lot about televisions and asked him if he could fix it. The friend told him he could repair it though he first needed to buy a replacement part. Pacheco went to the owner of the television, explained what the problem was and asked for money to buy the part. Pacheco got the money and the next day delivered the television to the owner as good as new. Pacheco and his friend shared the profits.”

“After that what happened?” Juan José wanted to know.

“In no time at all, Pacheco had more work than he could handle,” continued Pappy. “He hired a boy to help him and after several months determined he needed more space. He rented a place

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with everything he needed for his repair business. He became a hero in his community. People took all kinds of things to him. They knew when Pacheco couldn't fix something, it was time to throw it away and buy something new.

“Pacheco would tell his clients, ‘I will give you a guarantee. The guarantee is that 90% of the time, I will be able to fix it. The other 10% it will never work again!’ Everybody would laugh because they knew it to be true.

“This is one of life's great truths. Everything and everyone has a beginning and an end. Nothing escapes this ever present truth!”

“I had never thought of it in those terms,” said Juan José with a puzzled look. “I suppose when I really think about it, you are right!”

“As the years went by, Pacheco's business grew. He bought a big house and lived like a king. One day a government official came to his shop and told him the community wanted to honor him for all he had done in his neighborhood. He had been an excellent example for all who wanted to accomplish seemingly impossible dreams. Pacheco accepted the offer. On the day he was to receive the recognition, the official asked Pacheco to sign his name in the ledger which listed previous honorees. Pacheco told the official, ‘I would love to; there is only one problem, I don't know how to read or write.’

“The government official was surprised. He asked Pacheco how his life might have been if he knew how to read and write. Pacheco calmly replied, ‘I would be a watchman in a factory.’”

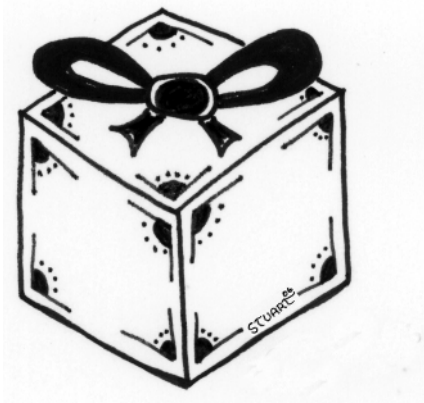
Juan José smiled.

“All we experience in life depends on our point of view,” said Pappy. “There are people who see a situation and say, ‘How come I

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always have so many problems!’ while other people facing the same situation say, ‘Life has provided me with an incredible challenge!’ We choose our attitude for better or worse when faced with life’s challenges.”

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### V. A Special Gift

**J**uan José considered Pappy’s story about Pacheco and asked, “Pappy, I understand Pacheco was successful, what should I do, start fixing things?”

“What works for one person will not necessarily work for another,” observed Pappy after smiling at the boy’s innocence. “We should all look for our own special talent, the one gift which makes each of us special. Sometimes it isn’t easy. There are people who go through their entire lives without finding their unique talent, their Special Gift. We all have a reason for living, some marvelous talent. Frequently, this gift is elusive. Sometimes it hides in the crevices beneath the rocks of life. Normally, we must dig and excavate to find it.”

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The boy thought for several minutes about Pappy's words. They remained silent for several minutes. The silence intrigued Juan José. Normally, he was uncomfortable when a sudden silence fell over the group while talking with his friends. With Pappy, the silence felt completely natural. Although there were many people walking around, Juan José felt as if the two of them were alone, in a bubble which protected them from the hustle and bustle of the street.

Finally, Juan José asked Pappy, "How can I find my gift, my reason for being in this world?"

The old man saw Juan José's bright, inquisitive eyes and sensed his strong desire to lead a successful life.

"We all have to seek and find our own path. There is no single road which works for everyone. The answer could come in a day, a month, a year or perhaps never come. What I can tell you is the Special Gift typically appears more rapidly for those who look for it than for those who are unaware of its existence.

"Unfortunately, the majority of the people in the world never find their Special Gift, their mission in life. They get up in the morning and go to work every day like a robot. If they are lucky, they enjoy their work though at times detest it. They continue because they don't know they have other options. They believe there is no other choice. Their lives consist of getting up in the morning, going through the paces of a hectic day and going to bed at night."

Juan José nodded in understanding. He wrinkled his nose perplexed and asked, "If I find my Special Gift, does that mean I will have a lot of money and a big house like Pacheco, the fix-it man in your story?"

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“Excellent question,” replied Pappy, again with a smile. “Finding our Special Gift often leads to material wealth, though not always. What is more important is to be satisfied with what we do and our place in the world. We all depend on others in some way or another. Those who are most successful typically satisfy the needs and desires of many. The rewards we receive when we discover our Special Gift can come in the form of material wealth as well as spiritual wealth for ourselves and for those who surround us.”

Juan José thought about what Pappy said and in that moment decided he didn’t want to wait his entire life to find his Special Gift. As he carefully considered Pappy’s words, he realized he knew many people who were sick and tired with their work and it was apparent in their lives. He also knew others who were incredibly satisfied with their lives. He was determined he would be one of those who were happy with their place in the world. He resolved to find his Special Gift and his mission in life.

“How can I find my Special Gift as soon as possible?” Juan José wanted to know.

The old man looked into the radiant eyes of the boy and answered, “There is no single path and no magic wish which will cause it to appear. There are, however, many ways to find your Special Gift. Let me ask you a question. Is there anything you have always wanted to do and have yet been unable to accomplish?”

The boy remained silent, thinking for a moment, and suddenly said, “Yes, there is something! I have always wanted go to Aguascalientes, the town where my father was born and I have never

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been there. Do you think I can find my Special Gift in Aguascalientes?”

Pappy smiled again at the innocence and simplicity children normally have and adults typically lose.

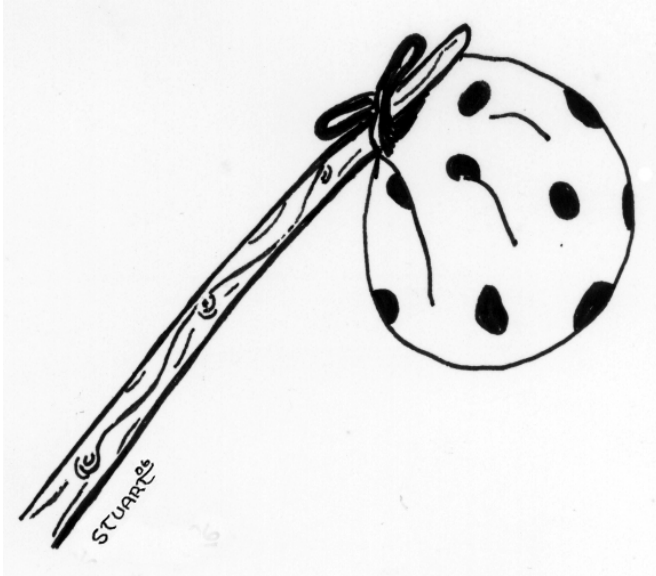
“It’s possible, though I can’t guarantee it. Out of curiosity, why haven’t you ever gone there?” Pappy wanted to know.

“We were going to go once and in the end didn’t have enough money for the trip. Afterwards, my father disappeared and my mother didn’t want to have anything to do with my father or Aguascalientes,” explained Juan José. “My father mentioned my grandfather was very well known in Aguascalientes. He told me he had a farm and was respected by all. I believe he is still alive and I often dream of my grandfather, life on a farm, riding horses, fixing fences and taking care of cattle.

“The only times I have left The Capitol have been on a couple of trips to the beach. I have grown up with the cement, smoke and noise of the city. I know nothing else. This is the reason why I would like to know where I came from.”

“Go, my son. Go and see what you can find,” said Pappy. “I suggest you go with those inquisitive eyes of yours wide open, willing to accept what you encounter. Many pass through life without looking around, as if in a burrow, without seeing the beauty which surrounds us. Life is an incredible journey and we can learn to enjoy each moment. While we never know when we are going to find our Special Gift, we can remember this instant is the most intense moment of our lives!”

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### VI. The Journey

“**Y**ou are never going to believe what happened today!” Juan José said excitedly when his mother got home from work.

“Calm down, son, what happened?”

“I lost my job,” started Juan José. “Please don’t worry because afterward something marvelous happened.”

“How can that be marvelous?” his mother wanted to know. “Now what are we going to do? You know very well we all need to contribute to make ends meet with our expenses and even then we still come up short!”

“I met a man whose name is ‘Pappy’ and he told me wonderful things. He told me that we all have a Special Gift, a mission in life.”

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“Juan José,” his mother scolded, “how many times have I told you not to talk to strangers?”

“I know, mom,” explained her son. “It’s hard to explain. When I met this man, I felt incredibly inspired and as I talked to him, it seemed as if he knew exactly what I was thinking and feeling the entire time.”

Juan José told his mother all about his conversation with Pappy. At first it terrified María Consuelo to think her son was talking to some strange man. Then she saw the excitement in her son’s face. She thought he should be sad because of what had happened with his work. Nevertheless, she saw an energy which sparkled in her son’s eyes and which she hadn’t seen in a long time. The last time she had seen the same enthusiasm was before her husband, José María, disappeared. Juan José’s passion for life faded when his father vanished and the flame which burned brightly in her son had been temporarily extinguished.

Now, she saw the spark once again in his eyes. She noticed Juan José’s lost enthusiasm was back and she also got excited. María Consuelo wanted the best for her children. She panicked when she thought of him traveling alone to Aguascalientes, though she also understood Pappy’s message and knew it to be true. María Consuelo wanted with all of her heart for Juan José to find his Special Gift and knew it was now his destiny to go to Aguascalientes.

Juan José started his journey that very evening. He was anxious to see where his father was born and to possibly find something which could change his life. He didn’t know exactly how he would get there; at the same time he had faith everything would turn out well.

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His mother prepared food and a change of clothes for his journey. His only problem was he had no money. Juan José left home scared yet confident he would find a way to achieve his objective.

As he arrived at the bus terminal he saw the hustle and bustle of all the people. Everyone hurried from one place to another. He asked several people and eventually found a bus going to Santa Fe, the closest major city to Aguascalientes. He approached the bus driver and said, “I need to get to Aguascalientes, the only problem is I have no money. I can work and help you in any way if you allow me to go with you.”

“Are you crazy?” yelled the driver. “How do you expect to get there if you have no money?”

At that moment, a lady who had heard everything approached.

“I heard what you said to the driver,” she said. “Why are you in such a hurry to go to Aguascalientes?”

“My father was born in Aguascalientes and I have to find something important there!” Juan José declared firmly.

“My name is María Elena Fernández. I have a package with some important documents I need to deliver to my father who lives in Los Dos Caminos, which is about a day’s walk from Santa Fe. While I desperately want to see my father, my son is very sick and I can’t leave him alone or take him with me to deliver the documents.”

“I hope your son gets better soon,” said Juan José empathetically.

“Thank you. I have an idea,” she went on, “since I cannot travel because of my son’s condition, how about if I pay your fare and you deliver the package to my father?”

“Of course, that would be great!” exclaimed Juan José.

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“You seem to be a good boy and something tells me you are honest,” María Elena acknowledged. “My father’s name is Don Emilio Fernández. As I mentioned, he lives in a town called Los Dos Caminos. It’s a one day walk from where the bus stops in Santa Fe. There is no other transportation available. Are you sure you are up for the trip?”

Juan José nodded yes with enthusiasm.

María Elena Fernández gave Juan José the exact address together with the bus ticket and the package for her father.

The driver overheard the conversation and said, “Los Dos Caminos isn’t in the same direction as Aguascalientes...”

“Don’t worry,” Juan José interrupted as the bus driver stood with his mouth agape, “before doing anything else I will deliver your package. I promise! I am used to walking and I’m in excellent physical condition.”

When Juan José gave the bus driver the ticket, the man smiled and said, “I see you’re a smart kid! Go ahead, my friend.”

Juan José said, “Thank you” and flashed the bus driver a huge smile which went from ear to ear as he boarded the bus and took his seat.

The boy felt he was embarking on an incredible journey. According to Pappy, he could find his Special Gift, his reason for being on earth at any given moment. He did not know where or how the information would come which revealed his Special Gift. He did, however, recall when Pappy said, “A Special Gift typically appears more rapidly for those who look for it than for those who are unaware of its existence.”

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Juan José began to think of the people he knew. There were few who appeared to really enjoy life. He thought of Mr. Romero, a gentleman who sold newspapers at a newsstand close to where he lived. He always had a smile on his face. He always said, “Top of the morning to you!” to everyone who passed. It didn’t matter if the people bought anything from him or not. He greeted everyone the same way. Juan José imagined it was one of the main reasons most people bought their newspapers and snacks from Mr. Romero’s newsstand.

There was another newsstand down the block and the man who worked there was a grouch. He didn’t greet people and when he gave people their change, he didn’t even say “thank you,” or “good day.” Mr. Romero’s newsstand was at least twice as large as the other and it was always well stocked with a wide variety of news items and candy. Juan José thought surely Mr. Romero had found his Special Gift.

There weren’t many people on the bus. Juan José stretched out and in no time was sound asleep.

He dreamed he returned to his neighborhood in The Capitol. As he walked down the street with a big smile, one of his friends asked, “Hey, buddy, why are you so happy?”

“I’ve found my Special Gift. I know what I want to do with my life. I have been on a fabulous journey and I now know my destiny!”

They looked at him as if he had come from another planet. One of them said, “We were born poor in this neighborhood and we are going to die poor in the same place. Nobody gets out of here alive!”

## **Rob McBride**

“It’s not just about money. I won’t let you steal my dream!” screamed Juan José. “I know I can accomplish something great in my life; Pappy told me so!”

As he said this, he began to run. The dream seemed so real, he could feel his heart beating faster and he was short of breath. His friends followed, taunting and making fun of him. As Juan José looked back, he suddenly fell in a huge pothole in the middle of the street. He started twisting and turning as he fell into an abyss.

At that moment, he woke up. He was disoriented and unsure of where he was and as he looked around, everything was dark. When he felt the bus moving, he remembered he was on his way to Aguascalientes. He thought about his dream, his friends and the people he knew in his neighborhood. He thought, “Surely if I returned with the knowledge of my Special Gift, they would be happy!” He could see no reason to be jealous or mad. Although Juan José didn’t understand the meaning of his dream, he considered how marvelous it would be to know his destination and mission in life. He realized his conversation with Pappy was having a tremendous impact on his thinking. “You never know when you are going to find your Special Gift!” Pappy had said.

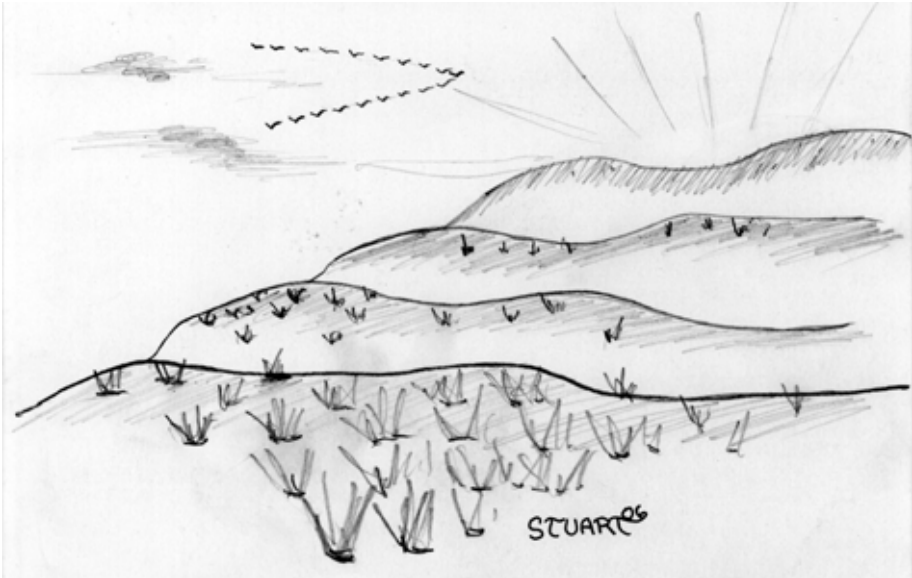
His mission was clear. He must find his Special Gift. At the same time, Juan José was scared and did not know what might happen during his adventure, especially since he did not have any money. As the bus rocked, he once again fell fast asleep.

He woke up and saw the Flatlands for as far as the eye could see. For the first time, he saw the wonders of this enchanted land about which he had previously read. He lost himself in the intense green

## **A Special Gift**

vegetation and hills which rolled like waves in the ocean. He thought of the contrast between this wonderful landscape and The Capitol with its tall buildings, cars and buses. He saw a flock of birds which floated through the sky in the shape of a “V” and remembered studying geese and the reason why they fly in this particular formation. The birds always work together. The strongest goes in the front and when it tires gives way to one in the back who moves up front fresh with energy. He considered the wonder of nature and the fact that everything in life has a reason.

He thought about the Special Gift he so desired. He imagined it to be something natural, simple and yet powerful. At that moment he remembered something else Pappy had told him. “This instant is the most intense moment in our lives.” As he basked in the beauty of the Flatlands, he understood the precise meaning of Pappy’s words.



## VII. Santa Fe

**J**uan José arrived in Santa Fe just after 5:00 P.M. He had already eaten what his mother had given him and once again he was hungry. Since it was too late for him to start the next leg of his journey, Mrs. Fernández' package would have to wait until the next day. He walked to a restaurant he saw on the plaza. As he entered, a man with a great big smile said, "Welcome, my name is Juan and I own this restaurant. You look lost. Are you hungry?"

"Yes, I am. The only problem is I have no money. Is there a chance I can do some kind of work in exchange for food?" asked Juan José shyly.

Don Juan thought the boy a little strange and immediately noticed he was outside his element. He told Juan José, "The person

## A Special Gift

who normally does the dishes called in sick. Do you know how to wash dishes?”

“Of course, I do!” answered Juan José without thinking twice. “I have never worked in a restaurant but washing dishes is my specialty!”

He worked without stopping from 6:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M. He was surprised at how many dishes he had to wash. As it turned out Don Juan offered wonderful home cooking at a very reasonable price. There were many people who came to his restaurant daily.

When all the customers had gone, Don Juan said, “Come and eat, son, you have worked hard.”

They sat down and began to eat. Don Juan smiled at Juan José and asked, “Where are you from?”

“I come from The Capitol.”

“That makes sense; I knew that you weren’t from here. What brings you to this neck of the woods?”

“It’s a long story,” said Juan José.

Don Juan laughed and replied, “No problem, I always make time to listen to others.”

“I lost my job yesterday,” Juan José started, “and I met a man named Pappy. He told me marvelous things. He suggested that I come to see my father’s birthplace.”

“That’s very interesting! Are you coming for any particular reason?”

“Yes, Pappy told me we all have a Special Gift and I want to find mine.”

## Rob McBride

Don Juan thought the idea was interesting and asked him to explain. Juan José began filling in all the details of the conversation with Pappy. When Juan José finished eating, he told Don Juan, “Pappy asked me, ‘Is there anything you have always wanted to do and have yet been unable to accomplish?’ I answered by telling him I wanted to see where my father was born and see if my grandfather is still alive.”

“What is your grandfather’s name?” Don Juan wanted to know.

“José Joaquín Sanchez.”

“That’s wonderful!” exclaimed Don Juan. “He is very well known in this area. I don’t know him personally although I have heard a lot about him. There was a time when he was one of the most influential people in the area.”

“Why is that?” Juan José wanted to know.

“If he is still alive, I think it would be best if he tells you himself. What I can tell you is he is very well respected.”

When they finished eating, Don Juan asked him, “Do you have any place to sleep, my friend?”

“No, sir, I don’t.”

“We have an extra bedroom and I am sure my wife would love to have a guest. Would you like to sleep at my house?”

“I would love to!” said Juan José with a sigh of relief because, in reality, he had no other option.

When they arrived at Don Juan’s house, everyone was sleeping. They entered; Don Juan indicated a room and said, “You can sleep here. There is a bathroom at the end of the hall you can use. Good night, Juan José. Sweet dreams!”

## A Special Gift

“Thank you very much,” the boy answered gratefully. “Good night.”

After brushing his teeth, Juan José went to the bedroom and lay down. He contemplated what had happened since the previous day when he had lost his job. He thought about the conversations he had with Pappy, his mother, Mrs. Fernández who had paid his bus fare and now earlier in the evening with Don Juan. He had never considered himself to be very lucky and now he felt as if he were the luckiest person in the world. He remembered a sign he had seen one time. “Luck comes when preparation meets opportunity,” it said. Maybe this was exactly what was happening. It could be he was getting ready to find his Special Gift and perhaps this was the reason good things were happening to him.

He woke up the next morning bewildered. At first, he didn’t know where he was and at the same time felt incredible. He didn’t hear the noise of the street which he was accustomed to hearing in his apartment. Normally, he woke up to the sound of horns and the traffic from the cars and buses which passed in front of his building. Now the only thing he could hear was the sound of the birds greeting the new day.

He went to the bathroom, washed up and found the kitchen. He was star struck. There, sitting next to Don Juan was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen in his life. She smiled brilliantly and said, “Good morning!”

The sweet melody of her voice left him breathless. Her hair was straight, black and long. Her face was angelic and her eyes alive and refreshing.

## **Rob McBride**

Don Juan said, “Juan José, I would like you to meet my daughter, María Antonieta.”

Juan José was paralyzed and said nothing. He felt if he moved in that exact instant, he would awaken from an incredible dream. Suddenly, Juan José snapped out of his trance and mumbled something which vaguely sounded like good morning.

As they ate, Juan José tried to concentrate on what Don Juan was saying and yet could not stop thinking of the living doll in his presence. After eating, Juan José said, “I should be going. I need to deliver the package Mrs. Fernández gave to me.”

“Do you know where you are going?” Don Juan asked.

“I have the address she gave me,” he said as he took it out of his pocket.

He unfolded the paper and opened it.

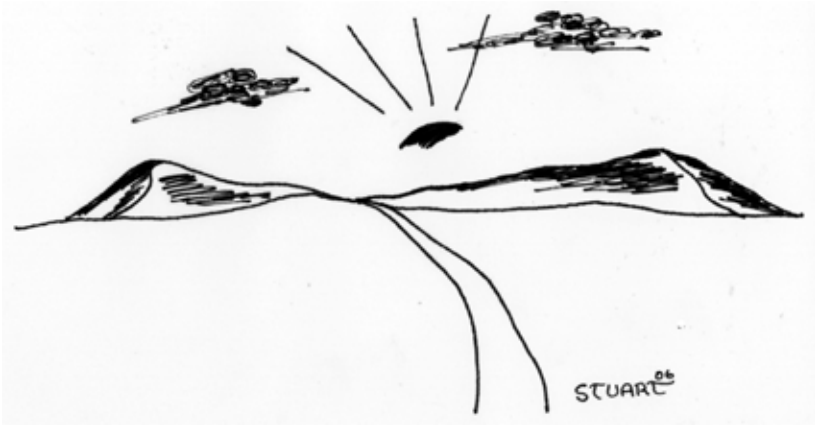
As Don Juan saw the instructions he said, “I know exactly where this is. Go to the end of this street and you will find a path.” He indicated a road to his right. “Keep following the path and you will get to Los Dos Caminos by the late afternoon. As you enter the town, the house will be on the left hand side of the main street.”

“Thank you again, Don Juan.”

“I want you to know it has been a pleasure meeting you, Juan José. You are always welcome in our house.” Juan José shook Don Juan’s hand, nodded a smile at María Antonieta and went outside. He crossed though the garden over a path of stones, into the street, turned right and started down the road. When he had walked several steps he turned around and saw María Antonieta was looking at him through the window. In that moment Juan José witnessed the most spectacular

## **A Special Gift**

smile he had seen in his entire life. They hadn't spoken more than five words yet he somehow knew she was an incredible person. He smiled, waved and continued his journey, her smiling face etched into his mind like a work of art.



## VIII. Ramón

**J**uan José started his journey with the memory of María Antonieta's angelic face. He couldn't think of anything else. He had met many girls from his school and his neighborhood. Some, he had known all his life. Nevertheless, María Antonieta was different. Butterflies started flying wildly in his stomach whenever he thought about her. When he first met her, he was anxious and nervous. He wanted to talk while they were eating and was speechless. It occurred to him she probably thought he was dim-witted. At the time, the way she looked at him gave him hope it wasn't so. María Antonieta's eyes shined like diamonds when she gazed at him. He thought, "Could it be she felt the same butterflies he felt?" With all of his heart he wanted to return and ask her what she was thinking and

## A Special Gift

feeling. For now, however, he had a mission. He had promised to deliver Mrs. Fernández' package, so he continued his adventure.

He encountered several people on the road. Juan José thought it strange they all greeted him with a smile. People weren't usually so friendly in The Capitol. They were always in a hurry and normally didn't greet each other unless they had met before. His mother had always told him to be wary of strangers. She would say, "You have to be careful with people, Juan José, you never know their true intentions!" He felt no fear walking on this spectacular path in the flatlands. It seemed as if the people acknowledged him to be nice and not because they wanted something from him or to take advantage of him in any way.

As he continued, the heat intensified. In spite of the rising temperature, the wind was clean and fresh. With each breath he felt an incredible energy surge through his body and he felt truly alive. He felt something important was going to happen in his life. While he didn't know what was going to happen or how, he perceived it could and would change the course of his life. He remembered hearing a phrase, "Positive thinking causes positive things to happen." He decided to think positively to see if it were true even though he wasn't entirely convinced. He had seen a lot of poverty in his life. If it were that easy, he thought, "Why didn't everyone think positively?" He considered the number of lives which could be changed with the simple act of thinking positively.

He came to a hill where a boy on a horse followed a herd of cattle. He stopped and looked at the boy. He figured he must be about his same age and noticed how easily he rode on his horse behind the

## Rob McBride

cattle as his dog herded them together. He played a drum as he watched his dog work. Juan José thought about the boy's life. How different it must be to live in the country, spending the days in the fresh air, playing a drum!

Juan José moved to one side while the cows passed. When the boy came, Juan José greeted him, "Good Morning."

"Good morning!" said the boy. "Where are you going?"

"I need to deliver some papers to Don Emilio Fernández. He lives in Los Dos Caminos."

"I know him very well; in fact, he and my grandfather are good friends."

"How much farther to Los Dos Caminos?" Juan José wanted to know.

"You still have a long way to go, my friend! What is your name?"

"I am Juan José and you?"

"I am Ramón. You aren't from around here, are you?"

"I am from The Capitol and have come to meet my grandfather who lives in Aguascalientes."

"You're going the wrong way! Don't you know Aguascalientes is over there?" he said pointing to the horizon over his shoulder.

"I know. Don Emilio Fernández' daughter paid my bus fare in exchange for my delivering these documents. After I deliver them I will go to Aguascalientes," Juan José said as he showed him the package.

"Now I understand," Ramón said with a nod of his head. "I am taking this herd of cattle to Santa Fe to sell in the market."

## A Special Gift

“Wow, that’s wonderful! It must be fun riding a horse. What is it like?” Juan José asked.

“You’ve never ridden a horse? For me it’s like walking,” said Ramón laughing. “I started to ride a horse about the same time I started to walk. It’s much better than walking, especially on long distances. Would you like to try?”

“I don’t know. It scares me!”

“Come on, my friend. Don’t be a coward! It’s easy.”

Ramón got down from the horse and helped Juan José onto the saddle. He took the reins and walked with the horse a little.



“This is wonderful!” exclaimed Juan José. “I feel as if I have a better view from up here.”

Ramón explained how to use the reins and told him to take a spin by himself. Juan José was going well until the horse started trotting.

“Now what do I do?” screamed Juan José scared out of his wits because he felt he might fall at any moment.

“You look like a robot bouncing around up there! You need to relax a little,” said Ramón with a laugh.

“How would you suggest I relax when I am about to fall?” protested Juan José.

“Whoa, Estrellita!” Ramón yelled firmly.

## Rob McBride

The horse stopped immediately. Ramón helped Juan José down from the horse and asked him, “What do you think?”

“For now I prefer to walk!” answered Juan José. “I feel like I was in a blender.”

The two looked at each other and began laughing hard. When their laughter subsided, Ramón said, “I wish I had a camera to take a picture. You looked terrified!”

“I don’t think I have ever been so scared in my life! I felt like I was going to fall and break all my bones. From down here it doesn’t look so high. From the saddle it looks like a long way down! How old are you?” Juan José asked, changing the subject.

“I just turned fifteen, how about you?”

“I am fourteen and turn fifteen next month.”

“We are almost exactly the same age,” noted Ramón. “What is it like to live in The Capitol?”

“What would you like to know?”

“Well, I have lived all my life in the country,” said Ramón. “I have always dreamed of going to The Capitol. It must be full of action, movement and excitement.”

“That’s for sure! There is a lot of action and a lot of movement together with a lot of traffic and noise. Yes, I suppose you can say it’s exciting. At times it can be too much since it is virtually impossible to escape and difficult to think with all the commotion.”

“I was born in Los Dos Caminos and fear I may live here in the Flatlands forever. My father needs my help on the farm. Since my only brother died, I am the only one who can help out.”

## A Special Gift

“That’s a shame! How did your brother die?” Juan José wanted to know.

“It was an accident. He was taking some cattle to market, just as I am doing today, when the herd spooked. My brother fell from his horse and was trampled. He died instantly from a severe blow to the head.”

“You’re not scared something like that might happen to you?”

“Here in the country, the only thing to fear is fear itself. At least that’s what my father always tells me. I confess I sometimes feel it, though I try to suppress it as much as possible. My father also says fear is the work of the Devil.”

“I had never heard that before. It’s certainly possible! Ramón, you know what?”

“What?”

“I have always dreamed about coming to the country. I always imagined it to be marvelous and fantastic. So far, it is as I imagined. I have been enjoying my entire adventure. At the same time, I now see that with all its marvels there are also disadvantages.”

“I have similar thoughts about The Capitol. I never thought of the noise and the traffic.” Ramón furrowed his brow and continued, “My grandfather always said, ‘We need to be happy with where we are and with what we have. That is the secret of happiness.’”

“It must be old people have come to an agreement,” responded Juan José.

“Why do you say that?”

“Because I met a man named Pappy and he says the exact same kind of things.”

## **Rob McBride**

“I hate to admit it, as inflexible as older people can be, they do know a lot about many different things,” conceded Ramón.

“I agree,” consented Juan José. “I have always thought older people didn’t know much. After meeting Pappy, I now realize that even with all their faults, old people know a lot about life!”

Since they were both hungry, Juan José and Ramón sat and ate. They shared the food they both had and talked about many different things. In no time they were fast friends and talking as if they had known each other their entire lives. Ramón explained the difficult life farmers and ranchers had in the country. Normally, they worked from the time the sun came up in the morning until it dipped back into the horizon. They both commented on the differences between living in The Capitol and living in the country, realizing each place had its advantages and disadvantages. When they finished eating they shook hands and continued their separate journeys.

## A Special Gift



### IX. Los Dos Caminos

Juan José arrived to Los Dos Caminos in the late afternoon. He quickly found Don Emilio Fernández' house and knocked on the door. Don Emilio opened the door and smiled. Juan José studied his face. His hair was short, black and straight. He had many wrinkles on his face and was older, though didn't appear to be old enough to be Mrs. Fernández' father. His eyes glistened as he talked.

“Good afternoon, young man. What brings you to my home?”

“I am looking for Mr. Don Emilio Fernández,” Juan José said hesitantly.

“You are looking at the one and only Emilio Fernández, at least in these parts,” Don Emilio said with a chuckle.

## **Rob McBride**

“Your daughter sent me to give you this package with some documents. She told me it was very important.”

“That’s right! I thought she would be bringing them personally. I was hoping she would come. Since she went to live in The Capitol, I almost never get a chance to see her. Even though, I was once young and understand we all need to follow our own path. You aren’t from here, are you?”

“I’m from The Capitol and will be going to Aguascalientes, where my father and grandfather were born.”

“What is your grandfather’s name?”

“His name is José Joaquín Sánchez.”

“Wow, that’s incredible! I know him very well. Of course, it’s been a long time since I have seen him. Everybody in this area knows of José Joaquín Sánchez. They call him, ‘Boss.’”

“Do you know if he is still alive?”

“Truthfully, I don’t know. Let’s see, I am 72 years old and he was perhaps 10 years older than I, so it’s difficult to say. When I knew him he was strong and full of energy. More than likely he will outlive all of us!” said Don Emilio with a laugh.

“I would like to get to Aguascalientes as soon as possible. Can you tell me the best way to get there?”

“I would be happy to tell you. First, rest awhile, you have had a long trip and it would be better for you to sleep here tonight in my humble abode. In the morning you can leave and will arrive by late afternoon if you keep up a good pace.”

“I don’t want to be a bother, are you sure?”

## A Special Gift

“Of course, I am sure! I have noticed recently I’m talking to myself and lately I don’t like what I hear! If you stay, you will give me at least one night when I can pretend I am not becoming senile.”

Juan José laughed. He instantly liked Don Emilio. He had a great sense of humor and a pleasant way of expressing himself which pleased Juan José.

“Come with me, son, I am sure you must be hungry.”

Don Emilio showed Juan José the way and started walking slowly but surely.

“May I ask you something?” Juan José wanted to know.

“Of course, you may.”

“You told me you are 72 years old yet you don’t seem to be old. Normally, old people have gray hair but your hair is all black!”

Don Emilio smiled and said, “First, let me tell you I don’t consider 72 years to be so old! Everything has to do with perception. At my age, 100 years seems old and 72 years is just right.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to offend you.”

“Don’t worry, son, no offense taken, I’m used to it. Because of the color of my hair, many people believe I am younger than I really am. My mother’s father was the same. He never had gray hair either. It must have something to do with genes.”

“That’s wonderful! I know a lot of people who are in a constant battle with their gray hair, including my mother.”

“I have always found people’s preoccupation with age to be interesting. As for me, I have always tried to think as a young man and, as a result, have never felt old,” reflected Don Emilio.

“It seems to work because you look marvelous!”

## **Rob McBride**

“Thank you, son. I feel great and it makes me happy to hear from someone else what I feel inside can be noticed by others.”

Don Emilio fixed something to eat and the conversation flowed freely. Juan José loved talking with Don Emilio. He had a way of speaking and expressing himself which was very different from people in The Capitol. He was more relaxed, thoughtful and had a wonderful sense of humor. The two laughed well into the night.

In the morning, they woke up and ate breakfast together. Don Emilio gave him food for his journey and told him, “It’s not necessary for you to go back to Santa Fe. There is a path which goes from here directly to Aguascalientes. It’s also about a day’s walk if you keep a good pace.”

Juan José thanked him for his hospitality and Don Emilio, in turn, thanked the boy for bringing the documents.

“Go with God and remember, God helps those who help themselves,” said Don Emilio.

They said goodbye and Juan José continued his adventure.

## A Special Gift



### X. Aguascalientes

As he walked the excitement of at last seeing Aguascalientes increased with each step. The conversation with Don Emilio from the previous night churned in his head. “What a difference there was between The Capitol and the country!” He couldn’t stop thinking about how different his life might have been had he been born and raised in the country. He thought about what Pappy had told him just a few days before, “You never know when you are going to find your Special Gift!” More than ever Juan José was convinced he was going to find his Special Gift in Aguascalientes.

The path to Aguascalientes was well marked and he enjoyed the journey. He imagined his grandfather must have taken this same path many times. He thought how peaceful it was to walk there, alone. His

## **Rob McBride**

mind soared as he thought about the events which had brought him to be walking along this path. Everything had happened so quickly. It was incredible. Just a couple of days before, he had gotten up to go to work to sell newspapers and now he was in a completely different world. When he lost his job he thought it was the end of the world. Now, in a special way, he was grateful for what had happened. Due to that traumatic event he met Pappy and was now in search of his Special Gift. It occurred to him that problems can often be blessings in disguise.

Late in the afternoon he came to the crest of hill and saw Aguascalientes for the first time. He got goose bumps thinking in a strange sort of way his life had started there. The view was spectacular. A river wound through the town, its banks lined with trees and vegetation. The sky was intense blue and contrasted splendidly with white fluffy clouds which floated slowly through the sky without hurry or destination. He had never seen anything so beautiful in his life. For a moment he couldn't believe his father ever wanted to leave this paradise which looked just like a post card. And for what, he thought, to live in The Capitol with all its noise and traffic? He still had so much to learn and yet was sure he would find at least some of the answers in Aguascalientes.

As he walked into town, passing by a house, he stopped short when a voice of an older lady suddenly asked, "Good afternoon, young man. Are you lost?"

Juan José looked to his left and then to his right and didn't see anyone.

"I am up here," laughed a lady who was on her roof.

## A Special Gift

“What are you doing up there?” Juan José asked with a puzzled look on his face.

“I like to keep my plants up here. I feel they grow better because they are closer to the sun. My neighbors think I am crazy and I suppose they are right!”

Juan José watched as she walked towards a wooden ladder on the side of the house, agilely climbed down and approached him. He realized she was tiny. She looked just like a little doll with blue eyes and shiny gray hair.

“Would you be so kind as to tell me where Mr. José Joaquín Sánchez lives?” Juan José asked.

“Boss? Of course, who would like to know?”

“My name is Juan José Sánchez. I am his grandson.”

“That’s wonderful! I see the resemblance. You look exactly like Boss looked when he was younger. My name is Ana María and I have known your grandfather for a very long time. Are you hungry?”

Juan José thought it was interesting that everybody always asked him if he was hungry. It must be they could see it in his face.

“Truthfully, I am hungry,” answered Juan José. “I’m also anxious to see my grandfather.”

“No problem, Juan José, I am going to show you how to get to his house. Take a minute to eat something first. It is about a 20 minute walk uphill. It would be a good idea for you to eat something.”

He had eaten the food Don Emilio gave him around lunchtime and since he was now hungry again, Juan José accepted the invitation. He followed her to the house and they went into the kitchen. She

## **Rob McBride**

started to heat some soup and asked, “What brings you to visit your grandfather? Is there some problem?”

“No, not at all,” replied Juan José. “I am looking for my Special Gift. I met a man named Pappy and he encouraged me to come and talk to my grandfather.”

Juan Jose told her all about the last few days while she listened attentively.

“It’s fabulous you are finally going to meet your grandfather!” she said when he had finished. “Boss always talks about his children and grandchildren who live in The Capitol. It makes him sad when time passes and he doesn’t hear from them. In particular, from his son José María, who must be your father, correct?”

“That’s true, he is my father. It’s been several years since he disappeared and we haven’t heard from him.”

“What a shame! You have no idea what happened?”

“No, not at all. If I knew he was alive or dead, I would be more at peace,” said Juan José with tears in his eyes. “Many people tell me he went off with another woman, although I don’t believe it. He loved all of us very much. Even if he were with another woman, I think he would have contacted us if he were alive. I fear he is dead although I really don’t know.”

“I have never liked big cities. With so many people, anything is possible.”

“There are some gangs close to where we live and I believe they had something to do with my father’s disappearance.”

“Can’t you ask them if they know something?”

## A Special Gift

“They scare me and I avoid them as much as possible. Perhaps you are right. I can ask them and see what they tell me.”

“Be very careful, Juan José!” said Ana María as she made the sign of the cross, “I wouldn’t want anything bad to happen to you.”

“Don’t worry, I will find a way to ask them without putting myself at risk.”

“The Capitol scares me,” confessed Ana María with a frightened look. “I was born in Aguascalientes and surely my last days will be here. I have gone to The Capitol for various things over the years, although I try not to stay long whenever I go.”

“What can you tell me about my grandfather?”

“Boss? He is very famous here in Aguascalientes and the region. He is already up there in years, as am I. All the same, he is tough and it appears as if he will never die. Several years ago he had a health problem and his doctor told him it would be best for him to prepare to die. He told the doctor he wasn’t going to die and he was right! In fact, I believe that same doctor has since passed on!

“Boss has some difficulties hearing and yet is strong as a horse. One thing not many people know is when I was young I was crazy in love with your grandfather. Truthfully, all the girls were in love with him! He was then and continues to be very handsome. He married the daughter of one of the biggest landowners in the area and the day he married, my hopes of being with him shattered. Now, however, we are both widowed. You never know what might happen!”

They both laughed.

“Boss? Why do people call him that?”

## Rob McBride

“An excellent question,” she said with a smile. “People have called him ‘Boss’ for so long, it hadn’t occurred to me it is a bit strange. Many years ago when Aguascalientes was even smaller than what it is today, he managed a group of people who fought for our rights as citizens. Gold abounded in our rivers and the companies who came took the gold and left disaster in their wake. Your grandfather directed an initiative which changed the laws and obliged the mining companies to use local labor and take care of the environment. For that reason so many people respect him and we call him ‘Boss.’”

Despite the fact that Juan José was thoroughly enjoying the conversation with Ana María, when he finished his soup, he stood up from the table and said, “I hate to eat and run. I am very anxious to meet my grandfather.”

“That was PDQ,” laughed Ana María.

“PDQ?” asked Juan José with confusion.

“It’s an expression my mother always used and I have remembered it all these years. It means, pretty ‘darn’ quick. Don’t worry, son. I wish you all the best. I only wish I could see your grandfather’s face when he sees you. Please send my best to him. You can tell him you met one of his secret admirers.”

Ana María indicated a path which wound up a hill on the other side of Aguascalientes. Juan José thanked her for the soup and was surprised when she approached him and gave him a kiss on the cheek.

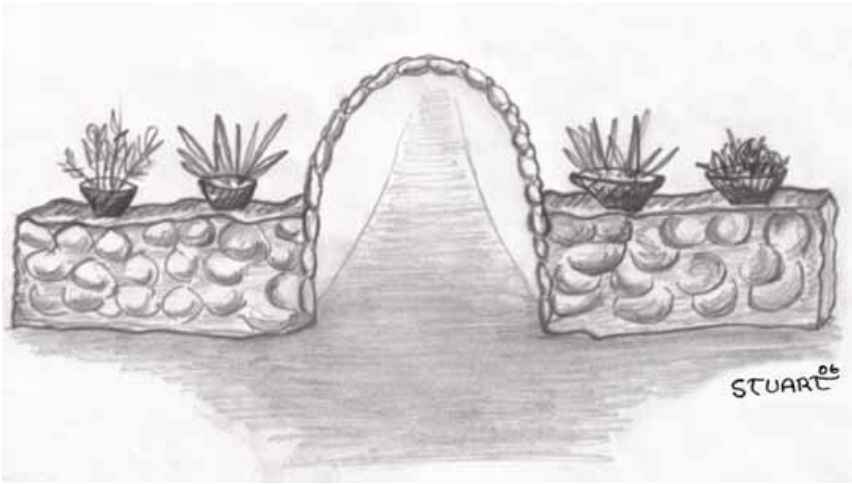
“Go with God,” she whispered.

Juan José flashed his sensational smile which went from ear to ear and continued his adventure.

## **A Special Gift**

The town was small and everyone seemed to know each other. While he passed through the narrow streets, people looked at him with interest and cordially greeted him. He noticed their interest in knowing from where he came and where he was going. At that moment, however, he was so anxious to meet his grandfather he didn't want to stop and talk to anyone.

When he arrived to the other side of the town, he found the path Ana María had indicated winding up the side of the hill. He began his ascent and the natural beauty immediately impressed him. The vegetation was dense and green. Birds sang and flew close to him as he walked. It seemed they were accompanying him on his adventure. After walking for about ten minutes he arrived at an entrance made of stone. He knew he had arrived at his destination and he was eager to finally meet the man people called "Boss.



## XI. Boss

“Good afternoon!” shouted Juan José. He couldn’t see anyone as he looked over a waist high wall made out of the same rocks as the entrance. The wall appeared to surround the entire property and a small, well kept house was about thirty feet from the entrance. What caught his attention most was the way the house was painted. He noticed many of the houses in town were made out of red building blocks and unpainted. It reminded him of many neighborhoods in The Capitol where he lived. This house was different. It was well kept, painted blue, red and yellow. It looked like a flag! Plants winked with multicolored flowers and surrounded the house while a well-groomed garden adorned the front yard. Trees enclosed the property and surely provided wonderful shade during the day.

## A Special Gift

“Hello, good afternoon. Is anybody home?”

Juan José still couldn't see anyone. Suddenly a man appeared silently from behind the house. From the gray hair and wrinkled face he was obviously aged; nevertheless, he walked upright with definite purpose.

“Good afternoon. To what and to whom do I owe the pleasure of this visit at this spectacular time of the day?” he asked smiling.

“Pardon the interruption,” answered Juan Jose, “I am looking for Mr. José Joaquín Sánchez.”

“Look no more, son, you've found him! At least last time I looked in the mirror I was one and the same. You look familiar. Do I know you from somewhere?”

“I don't know exactly how to tell you this. I am your grandson. I am José María's youngest son.”

Boss was paralyzed. Juan José also remained frozen in his tracks. His grandfather was the same height as Juan José and his eyes twinkled in the twilight which indicated dusk. Despite his years, he didn't seem as fragile and delicate as many older people Juan José knew. His body was strong, his posture straight and erect. Juan José immediately perceived the confidence and security his grandfather emanated. Juan José suddenly found strength, entered and put his hand out as his grandfather approached.

“I prefer a hug!” declared the older man.

They embraced and Juan José was surprised at his grandfather's strength. They remained in each others arms for what seemed to be an eternity but what in reality was perhaps a minute. As they separated,

## Rob McBride

they looked at each other as the older man firmly held his grandson's shoulders.

"I have dreamed of this day for so long," Boss stated. I knew the day would come when I would meet you. I have known of you, your brothers and your sister since you were all born. I had faith I would one day meet you and the day has come!"

Juan José noted his grandfather's eyes were moist with tears of joy which hung pendulously without spilling from their wells onto his cheeks. Meanwhile, Juan José was crying like a baby. Tears of happiness rolled down his cheeks without shame or disgrace. Like a bolt of lightning, he felt an immediate connection with this man who many called "Boss."

"Sir, I have wanted to meet you for so long," cried Juan José.

"Pardon me, but who is 'sir'?"

"I apologize, I don't understand the question," answered Juan José confused.

"Please, Juan José, here there is no 'sir,' only you and me."

"It seems strange to treat you so informally. I promise I'll do my best."

"Come with me, son," said Boss as he turned and began walking.

Juan José followed his grandfather. They walked around the house underneath a roof which extended about six feet from the main structure. Juan José saw flowers hanging from the rafters and which appeared to grow in every nook and



## A Special Gift

cranny. Behind the house was a much larger roof which extended out onto a patio. There was a table with four chairs to the left and two chairs with a small table in the middle of the patio. Boss sat in one of the chairs beside the small table and indicated Juan José sit in the other.

“I was bidding farewell to the day when you arrived,” Boss told his grandson.

“How do you do that?” Juan José asked with curiosity.

“It’s a routine I started many years ago. Now we can do it together. I have waited so long for this day. Let’s celebrate this spectacular day which has brought you to me.”

Juan José sat down and marveled at the spectacular view. The property was much bigger than he initially thought. Looking down, he could see the river winding through the town. He saw the sun was beginning to disappear into the horizon.

“This is wonderful!” exclaimed Juan José.

“I am pleased you like it. Each day I come here to think about what I have accomplished during the day and to consider all I would like to do the following day.”

“In The Capitol I usually don’t realize the day is coming to an end until it’s already gone,” commented Juan José.

“For many years I wasn’t aware either. One day I realized it would be a good idea to greet each day with the sunrise and to bid farewell to each day with the sunset. Since that time, my life has become more meaningful,” said Boss with a smile.

“I have so much I want to tell you and ask you. I don’t even know where to start,” Juan José said.

## **Rob McBride**

“We have time, Juan José. First let’s take a few minutes to watch the sunset and be grateful for this moment. Would you like to join me on the grass for a little exercise or would you like stay here?”

“I’m comfortable here,” answered the boy.

His grandfather took a small mat from the patio, walked to the grass, placed it on the ground facing the sun, took off his shirt and began moving slowly in strange poses.

Juan José looked at him with interest and then turned his attention towards the sunset which he saw, as if for the first time. As his grandfather indicated, it didn’t take more than a few minutes for the sun to disappear into the horizon. It seemed as if the sun moved in slow motion and he could see its slow steady path as it moved towards its final destination.

When the last rays had gone, Juan José looked at his grandfather. He had his eyes closed and appeared to be in total peace. Juan José marveled at this man sitting on the grass. He had longed to meet him for years and now there he was bigger than life itself. This man, known as Boss, radiated an incredible energy. There was an aura of calmness and security which attracted Juan José. He felt charged with energy just by being close to him. Boss slowly opened his eyes and walked towards Juan José and sat down once again.

“Did you enjoy the sunset, Juan José?”

“It was splendid! What a wonderful way to finish the day. I have a question.”

“Tell me, what is it, my son?”

“What were you doing with all those strange poses?”

## A Special Gift

“I imagine it must look kind of crazy!” laughed the old man. “I was doing some stretching and meditating exercises a friend of mine taught me many years ago. I have changed and modified them over time.”

“At one point you looked like you were tied up in a knot. I was afraid you might not be able to get untangled!”

“When I first started learning the exercises I wasn’t sure I would be able to do them either! In time, my flexibility has increased.”

“I noticed!” pronounced Juan José. “I’m not sure about something. I don’t know what to call you. I have been told many call you ‘Boss’ and you are also my grandfather. What would you like me to call you?”

“I have always wanted someone to call me ‘Gramps.’ It reminds me of my own grandfather. We always called him ‘Gramps.’”

“Perfect, I’ll call you ‘Gramps.’”

“What inspiration brought you here, Juan José?”

“How do you know it was an inspiration?”

“After a few years in this world,” laughed his grandfather, “I realize it is normally moments of inspiration which drive us to do things out of the ordinary.”

“It was, in fact, an inspiration! I lost my job and met an old man named Pappy. He shared some ideas with me which really made me think.”

“What were the ideas?”

“He mentioned everyone has a gift, a special reason for being in the world. He told me each of us should try to find our own Special Gift. At first, I didn’t understand what he meant. I’m still not entirely

## **Rob McBride**

sure exactly how I am going to find my Special Gift. He did tell me I should do something I have always wanted to do. I have always wanted to meet you and now here I am, Gramps.”

“I think it’s magnificent you met Pappy and your decision brought you here. Someone told me something similar many years ago. It was at that time I decided I could and would do something important during my life, something significant which would make a positive difference in many people’s lives.”

“Did you find your Special Gift, Gramps?”

“I never thought about it in those terms. Now that you ask me, I would say ‘yes, I have found my Special Gift.’”

“How did you find it,” Juan José wanted to know.

“In my case it wasn’t anything I went looking for; instead it came with time and disguised as adversity. Specifically, we had challenges to resolve here in Aguascalientes. In my case, I simply decided to be useful. From that decision, a series of events unfolded which made a tremendous impact on my life.”

“I met a lady named Ana María when I arrived in Aguascalientes and she explained a little about your story. In fact, she asked me to tell you ‘hello from one of your secret admirers.’”

“We’ve known each other a long time,” Boss laughed deeply. “Ana María is wonderful. She always makes me feel like I am twenty years old. She’s a good friend and I value her friendship.”

“It appears there may still be some spark in the relationship!” commented Juan José with a mischievous smile. “It’s never too late to begin a romance.”

“Maybe you are right, son! I’m old, yet still alive and kicking.”

## A Special Gift

“I was just thinking,” Juan José said as he wrinkled his brow, with a confused look on his face. “I was thinking about all you did here in Aguascalientes when you were younger. How can I use that information to find my Special Gift?”

“The wonder of young innocence,” reflected his grandfather. “Truthfully, I don’t know. I have never thought specifically about a ‘Special Gift.’ What I do know and can tell you is each of us must take our own path. One of the biggest errors we make is trying to follow the footsteps of another. I am thrilled you have come here, Juan José, and I have something which I am confident will help you in your search. I know you are anxious to find your own path as soon as possible. Right now, however, I am hungry. How about you?”

“I just ate with Ana María, though I can always eat. My mother tells me I have no problem with food. I eat everything and lots of it!”

Boss laughed and his entire body moved. As his laughter subsided, he rose, walked into the house and to the kitchen as Juan José followed. While preparing something to eat, Boss commented, “It’s been a long time since I have talked to your father, José María. If my memory doesn’t fail me, which is quite often these days, it has been more than two years since I have heard from him.”

“One day, about two years ago, he left for work and never came back. Since that time, we know nothing of him,” responded Juan José.

The anguish on Boss’ face was evident. He murmured, “No wonder he didn’t write. Even though we were never very close, he would write me from time to time to keep me informed and ask how I was doing. I have been extremely worried about him and I have had a feeling something was amiss.”

## Rob McBride

“We don’t know,” explained Juan José, “if he had problems with one of the gangs in our neighborhood or if he met another woman and ran away. My mom tells us she believes he was always faithful to her. I understand she doesn’t want to think another woman was responsible for his disappearance. Even though, if he were alive, I think he would have at least contacted me, my brothers or sister since we have always had a good relationship.”

“That’s very strange. I realize my son was no saint. Like all of us, he has his faults and weaknesses. It does, however, seem strange he would not contact you if he were alive. From what you tell me, I fear something bad has happened to him.”

“I just would like to know what happened,” admitted Juan José. “If I knew what happened to him, I am sure I would be more at peace with myself.”

“You yourself just said, ‘it is never too late.’”

“You’re right, Gramps,” commented Juan José with watery eyes. “There is something which has always puzzled me.”

“What is it, Juan José?”

“I don’t understand why my father would leave Aguascalientes and move to The Capitol. I now know why you were so important in the town’s history and it seems to me he would have had far greater opportunities here in Aguascalientes than in The Capitol.”

“What you say makes sense, Juan José. At the same time, Aguascalientes is just a small town. It can never compare with The Capitol in terms of opportunity. There is only one thing I regret with regards to your father.”

“What is it, Gramps?”

## A Special Gift

“Your father and I had a disagreement long ago when he moved to The Capitol. After the dispute, many years passed before we were able to settle our differences. I wish I hadn’t been so stubborn. I feel I could have been more helpful to your father when he needed me most. He told me he wanted to do things his own way and I, despite my better judgment, let him be. I could have been much more helpful to your father.”

“That’s ok, Gramps. We all make mistakes.”

“Thank you, Juan José. What I have told you has bothered me for many years and it’s helpful to talk with you about it.”

Boss wanted to know all about Juan José’s family. They talked about his mother, his two brothers José Gregorio and José Antonio as well as his sister María José. Boss, in turn, told him about his father Juan María and about being a child and growing up in Aguascalientes. He sadly described the day José María left to go to The Capitol in search of his fortune.

Boss told Juan José he and his wife, María Esperanza, had eight children.

“What about my grandmother?” Juan José wanted to know.

“She died a couple of years ago. She lived a full and extraordinary life. I miss her a lot, although I understand everyone’s day must come. There is nobody who has been able to escape this world alive. Nevertheless, I want to be the first!”

They both laughed.

“Where are your other children, my aunts and uncles?”

“Two of them died shortly after they were born and the others left Aguascalientes long ago. Two emigrated to different countries and

## **Rob McBride**

the other four, including your father, José María, went to live in different cities. My youngest daughter lives in Santa Fe and is the one who lives the closest. I have a great relationship with her. She comes often to Aguascalientes with her husband and children to visit me. I wish I would have shared more of the valuable lessons I have learned during my lifetime with all of my children,” he sighed longingly.

“It’s never too late, Gramps! You can start with me,” stated Juan José.

Boss saw his grandson’s enthusiasm and said, “I love your spirit, Juan José. You remind me of myself when I was your age. I’m extremely anxious to share some ideas with you. It’s been a long day and it’s too late tonight. Tomorrow I have something very special I want to give to you. I have been waiting for the right moment and now I know the time for which I waited so long has finally come.”

Juan José looked at his grandfather with inquisitive eyes and wondered what his grandfather had in mind. It excited him just thinking about what his grandfather might have in store for him.

Boss stood up and showed him to a small room with a bed, a night table and a place to put his clothes. “I always have this bedroom ready for visitors. I’m so happy you are here with me, Juan José. I have often thought of you and am sure I can help you with your search for your Special Gift. It makes me happy to think I can help you with your search. There is nothing more satisfying than feeling needed, especially when one is old and has much of his life behind him.”

Juan José went to the bathroom, washed himself and returned to his bedroom. He got into bed and covered himself with a blanket which seemed to be made of clouds. It was soft, light and comfortable.

## **A Special Gift**

As soon as his head touched the exquisite folds of the pillow he was fast asleep.



## XII. The Gift

When Juan José woke up the crescent moon was shining through the window. It was still dark and he was impressed by the beauty of the moon surrounded by bright stars. As he watched the spectacle he thought about the previous day. It was incredible; he was at last in his grandfather's house, meeting him for the first time.

As it began to get light, he got up and went to the bathroom. He then found his grandfather doing the same strange movements in the front garden. Juan José saw his grandfather concentrating deeply in what he was doing, so he sat and watched. Moments later, the sun began peeking out from the horizon. The clouds changed colors with each passing moment. At first they were dark gray, then purple and

## A Special Gift

pink. Five minutes later the show was over and the white clouds stood in sharp contrast against the bright blue sky.

“Good morning!” Boss said with a smile.

“Good morning, Gramps. It looks like you were doing the same movements from last night, only faster!”

“Just as last night, I must look a little crazy here in the early morning with no shirt, barefoot in the grass. It’s my way of greeting the new day. I do a series of stretching movements to start every day.”

“Every day?” Juan José wanted to know.

“Absolutely! I realize it’s the best way to get the day going. You must be hungry.”

“I have learned to always accept food. Turning it down is bad for my health!”

“You’re a funny guy, Juan José,” Boss said with a laugh.

As he put on his shirt and sandals, Boss approached Juan José.

“It’s incredible to have you here with me,” he said as he placed his hand on Juan José’s shoulder. The boy felt the strength and energy of his grandfather’s hand on his shoulder. They both turned and entered the house with Boss’ arm around Juan José’s shoulders. As they prepared coffee and a light breakfast, they talked and the conversation flowed as a river flows over smooth rocks. Juan José loved being with his grandfather. He emanated a sense of peace and tranquility Juan José had never witnessed. His presence commanded courteous respect. At the same time, he was open and uncomplicated. What impressed Juan José the most was the way his grandfather truly listened to everything he said. Juan José sensed his grandfather focused on each syllable and word as they flowed into thoughts and

## **Rob McBride**

ideas. He recalled talking to other people who only waited for an opening to give their opinion as they listened impatiently. His grandfather waited until Juan José finished talking, took a breath, pondered what he had heard and then spoke. Time and again, the words Boss articulated were pearls of wisdom.

After eating and doing the dishes, Boss motioned to the back of the house and said, “Go to the garden. I’ll be with you in a moment. I need to get something.”

Juan José walked out into the garden and sat down in one of the chairs where he had seen the sunset the previous day. Now, in the light of day, he looked at all of the plants in the garden. The previous night he didn’t notice the tremendous variety. Some had colorful flowers while others had vegetables which weighed on their vines. The grass which started where the patio finished was green and dense.

He took off his shoes and walked to the grass to feel the softness with his feet. Instead, the grass which appeared to be a soft carpet gently prickled his feet as he walked. He felt the fresh dew between his toes. He closed his eyes and perceived the distinct smells which came from the garden. He distinguished the different scents which the wind brought in delicate waves, the smell of flowers, wet grass and suddenly the smell of coffee. He opened his eyes and his grandfather handed him a cup of coffee.

“Do you drink coffee, son?”

“Of course, I love it!” confirmed the boy as he took the small cup which had produced such a wonderful smell.

They walked back to patio and sat down as they placed their cups on the table between them. Boss reached inside his jacket and

## A Special Gift

produced a small book. The cover was leather and worn; it appeared to be very old.

“More than sixty years ago,” Boss began, as he sipped his coffee, “a conversation I had with my grandfather changed my life. He started by telling me initiative is one of the most important things anyone can have in their life. At first, I didn’t understand what he meant by initiative. What’s more, I didn’t see what it had to do with my life. He explained that the great majority of people in this world are followers and there are very few leaders. He continued by telling me about 90% of the people are followers and only 10% are leaders. Initially, I had trouble understanding the importance of these numbers. He clarified a simple truth about people who achieve great things in their lives. They are those who take initiative and drive change. According to my grandfather, these people are admired and respected in their communities. It is their initiative which creates vision, change and action. While not always popular, it is this change and action which defines a society.”

“Does it have something to do with not only making a decision but also taking action?” Juan José wanted to know.

“That’s correct, Juan José! I see you are not only handsome but also intelligent. Certainly those qualities come from your grandmother,” said Boss again with a smile.

“What else did you learn from my great-great grandfather,” asked Juan José.”

“I will tell you more in a moment. First, I want to tell you his name was also Juan José. Did you know that?”

## **Rob McBride**

“My father told me my name came from someone in the family. Truthfully, I had forgotten after whom I had been named.”

“My grandfather,” continued Boss, “was a very studious person. He read everything he could get his hands on. He had a great relationship with all of the salespeople who came to Aguascalientes and he always asked them to bring him books. Education was of the utmost importance to him. Many knew he was a very educated man. What was not so well known is that he also loved to write. He kept a diary of his thoughts and wrote about many different topics.”

“Is the book you have in your hands one of his diaries?”

“This book was my grandfather’s most valued treasure. It’s a summary of the thoughts and ideas he deemed essential to living a plentiful and productive life.”

“Could it contain the answer about how I can find my Special Gift?” Juan José asked excitedly.

Boss looked at Juan José’s eyes and contemplated the circumstances which had brought his grandson to his side, now talking about this treasure which his own grandfather had given him so many years ago.

“It’s probable your great-great grandfather’s words will be an important part of your search, Juan José. They are words which, in spite of being written many years ago, are as significant today as they were more than sixty years ago when he wrote them. This book has accompanied me through almost my entire life. I have always kept it on the small table beside my bed and read its pages every night before going to sleep. Many people have praised me during my life for my vision and capacity to achieve what others thought was impossible. I

## A Special Gift

owe all of my accomplishments to this small book which has guided me through the good and the bad.

“Just as my grandfather gave me this book, I want to give it to you, Juan José. If you want the book, it comes with a specific responsibility and condition. It’s the same proposition my grandfather made to me when he gave me the book so many years ago. Are you willing to accept the responsibility and condition?”

“I see you accepted, right?”

“Yes, I did,” Boss declared, “and I never forgot the responsibility and condition.”

“What is the condition?” Juan José asked frowning his brow.

“Each night before you go to sleep you must read one of the principles for living a plentiful and productive life. Each is brief and can be read in two to three minutes.”

“Is that all? Doesn’t seem so difficult to me,” commented Juan José.

“It’s very simple. Frequently, the most important things seem quite simple. At the same time, they may not be so easy. What is most important is to develop the habit of reading each and every night. The two to three minutes you spend reading nightly will change your life.”

“And the responsibility?” inquired the boy.

“You must do everything possible to integrate the principles into your life and you must share the wisdom of the words with others. The best way to show others is by being a good example.”

“I will do both things, Gramps, I promise. May I ask you something?”

“Of course, my son, what is it?”

## Rob McBride

“Why haven’t you ever given the book to anyone else? Why are you giving it to me now?”

“That’s a good question, Juan José,” Boss answered. “There are many people who have benefited from the words written in this book. I have shared the principles with many. I did have to fulfill one last promise my grandfather asked before he gave me the book.”

“What was that?” Juan José asked.

“My grandfather told me I should share the message with everyone. I should give the book only to someone who came into my life in search of their destiny in this world, someone who wanted to know the reason they were here on this planet. While I have met many people over the years, when you told me last night you were searching for your Special Gift, I immediately knew you were the one. I have an idea,” Boss stated.

“Sing it to me in a song!” responded Juan José.

Boss started laughing so hard he doubled over in his chair and his eyes began to water. Juan José also began to laugh without really knowing why.

“What’s so funny, Gramps,” asked Juan José when their laughter subsided.

“Your father, José María, always asked me the same thing! I would answer in a song and he would laugh hysterically.

“Peruse the pages of this brave little book while I bask by the brook,” Boss sang gleefully.

Juan José laughed as Boss gently placed the book in Juan José’s hands. When his fingers touched the soft worn leather he felt an

## **A Special Gift**

incredible energy radiate from the book. The cover was old and beautiful. It said simply:

### *Reflections*

*By: Juan José Sánchez*

The writing was elegant and reminded him of an invitation his family had once received for a wedding. Juan José contemplated the words which danced elegantly on the cover. He imagined his great-great grandfather sitting next to a candle many years before, pondering the words as well. He was in a time capsule. The garden's beauty engulfed and isolated him from the world as each syllable echoed eloquently in his mind.



### **XIII. Reflections**

*I dedicate this book to my grandson, José Joaquín  
who over the years has shown a special curiosity  
for life and amazement for the wonderful  
world in which we live.*

# ATTITUDE

*A ction*

*T enacity*

*T olerance*

*I nitiative*

*T emperance*

*U sefulness*

*D esire*

*E nergy*

## *Introduction:*

*With this small volume I do not pretend to give all the answers to life, rather to formulate principles which establish a foundation which creates a more plentiful and productive life. The principles come from experience, learning and time. They are all elements which lead to peace with oneself and with the world in which we live.*

*Each principle may be read in two to three minutes. The best way to benefit from these words is to develop the habit of reading one principle each night. Reading the principles before sleeping allows the mind to soar and reflect on the ideas during the night. The messages are incorporated into our being which, in turn, lead to a more plentiful and productive life.*

*Integrating each principle into our life leads us to attain and maintain an excellent positive attitude, the most important ingredient to appreciate this wonderful adventure we call life. A positive enthusiastic attitude is the key to attaining any objective we desire.*

*Our attitude creates an exponential effect in our lives. An excellent positive attitude provides us with the strength necessary to face life's daily challenges, problems and difficulties. A negative*

## Reflections

*attitude buries our thoughts in a toxic dump consuming strength required to face the same challenges, problems and difficulties. Both positive and negative attitudes create our expectancy towards life.*

*One of the most important challenges we face is to maintain a positive attitude in difficult situations. The same way a tree needs the wind to grow healthy and strong, we also need challenges, problems and difficulties to move forward.*

*Difficult and trying times define our character. A difficult situation seen as a challenge is approached from a different perspective, a position which drives us to overcome, conquer and triumph. In addition, we learn from difficult situations and integrate the lessons into our daily lives.*

*There are eight principles in this small volume. Each principle allows us to attain and maintain a superb attitude. When confronted with a complex situation, these words can serve as a guide. Creating the habit of reading these principles each night before going to sleep integrates the words into our lives. Our habits and routines create our being. Each day has more than 1,400 minutes. Dedicating two to three minutes daily before sleeping every night converts these thoughts into reality and leads to a more plentiful and productive life.*

## *Action*

*Taking action is essential to achieve our goals and objectives. Without action life's opportunities remain scattered and abandoned by the wayside.*

*Intentions and plans proliferate. As human beings, our minds never stop thinking, imagining and creating. We constantly look for something better. The difference between actors and spectators in the theatre of life is action.*

*The road to any objective begins with an initial step. Before assuming the risk involved in implementing any idea, we analyze and consider alternatives and consequences. While logical in process and prudent in theory, too much analysis creates paralysis.*

*Taking control of our future entails taking action today to eliminate the horrible habit of leaving for tomorrow what can be accomplished today. What we leave for tomorrow can also be postponed for another day. Each day we let pass without definite action towards our burning desire causes us to drift farther away from our objectives, like a boat without a rudder subject to the winds of change. The best time to implement any activity which promotes positive change in our future is this instant.*

## Reflections

*The most intense moment of our lives is, in fact, this instant. What happened yesterday and what comes tomorrow can never compare with the intensity of this moment. Yesterday is a dream and tomorrow is a promise yet unfulfilled. The only thing we have with certainty is this instant. What we fail to do in this moment may well be left undone forever.*

*It is easy to realize what we should do. In fact, often we know exactly what needs to be done and how we need to do it. What is difficult is taking action and actually doing it.*

*Fear of failure is a common enemy. The possibility of failure is one of the main reasons we stop at the precise moment we need to take action. Failure, as such, is a relative term. Those who have been the most successful in life are also those who have failure as a familiar friend. Failure and success are interrelated. Those who take calculated risks, even in the face of failure, are those most likely to achieve elevated levels of success.*

*Failure drives us to modify our path in order to assure we reach our objectives. There are many roads to success, yet not one road assures success for everyone. We must each find our own direction. What works for one can be a disaster for another. Starting down a path is essential. Making adjustments and managing change is critical. Tomorrow will come with any path we choose, though not always with the desired destination.*

**Rob McBride**

*Life is a random walk determined by peculiar circumstances which create our direction and destiny. Cultivating the habit of taking action fortifies our character, increases our confidence and allows us to achieve what many deem impossible.*

*Our ability to build a better tomorrow is determined by the action we take today.*

### *Tenacity*

*Tenacity is our capacity to continue working on a job or task until we achieve the result we desire. Persistence is imperative to attain goals and objectives.*

*Obstacles and difficulties generate a desire to surrender. Impediment and inconvenience determine our character and define our destiny. Our reaction to adversity can create power or enhance vulnerability. The best way to confront a problem tenaciously is to perceive difficulties as challenges, not obstacles.*

*In nature, perseverance and persistence always win. A river has no concept of time. Regardless of whether it takes a day, a month or a century to overcome an obstacle, it continues its course until achieving its objective. It never tires from being diverted and doesn't complain when things get difficult. It simply continues in spite of hindrance and hurdles.*

*We can learn much from the river which adheres to its course. Life's events are neither good nor bad, they simply are. We assign qualities to a particular event depending on our experience and point of view. Life's most wonderful moments frequently come after the most trying and turbulent times. During these cycles tenacity creates*

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*the most inspiring and intense reflections and responses to overcome difficulty.*

*Tenacity in our occupation can be the difference between achieving success and having to look for another profession. Everything is difficult before it is easy. The master carpenter must learn to make mistakes before becoming a craftsman. The apprentice observes, listens and practices before creating a masterpiece.*

*The desire to learn from each situation also allows us to be more tenacious. When we look at problems as opportunities to learn, we change our perspective and expect to overcome challenges. We do not grow old as a result of age, rather as a result of a broken spirit. We remain young at heart as long as we learn and grow. When we are green we grow; when we are ripe, we rot.*

*Tenacity is not innate; it is learned. We learn to be tenacious through success and failure. When we quit, we learn to give up. When we persevere, we learn to be tenacious. This, in turn, pays tremendous dividends.*

*Education, knowledge and intelligence are elements which contribute greatly to our success. Without adding the ingredient of tenacity, however, we fall short of our desires. To achieve our objectives, it is imperative to have the will to gain wisdom which provides us with the power to persist in complex situations.*

*Tenacity elicits the use of all resources at our disposal which allow us to attain objectives and desires in spite of the multi-layered*

## **Reflections**

*myriad of obstacles which create detours and deviations in our journey.*

## *Tolerance*

*In life some elements are within our realm of control and others exceed our grasp. While it is important to influence and change those things within our power of control, it is also critical to tolerate those beyond our reach.*

*Many worry about the weather. While it is valuable to be aware of climatic changes, there is nothing we can do to modify the weather. Instead of allowing unknown elements to influence our behavior, it is imperative we adjust our attitude to those factors within our control. While convenient to regulate our disposition with the weather, in the end it doesn't matter if the weather is wonderful or wild, we can be content in either situation. We are masters of our attitudes and have the power to establish our attitude daily for better or worse.*

*Our ability to tolerate those things which exceed our influence frees us from the often perceived need to change our environment. We participate, though we are not responsible for all that occurs in our immediate surroundings. Many times things happen which are impossible to change and difficult to understand. Awareness of this simple truth leads to inner peace and tranquility.*

## Reflections

*There are also situations which we can positively influence in our environment. We often have the power to change and mold the world around us. Taking initiative and action to create positive change is one of life's most intense pleasures. Many things can be changed in our immediate surroundings and we should take every opportunity to effect positive change in our world. At the same time, understanding we cannot change everything encourages us to focus on those things within our control.*

*There will be people whose vision of the world differs from our own. Instead of trying to convince them ours is the correct path, we can listen attentively and attempt to understand their reasoning. Tolerance implies accepting differing opinions without feeling the obligation to convince others they are mistaken.*

*Tolerance allows us to listen more and speak less. People love to talk about themselves and when we listen to them completely and attentively without judging or criticizing, we demonstrate our interest in them as individuals and demonstrate our value for their opinions.*

*Death, sickness and injustice are all difficult to comprehend. We can influence the intensity, frequency and duration of our emotions for the most unfortunate occurrences in our lives. The knowledge that time heals all wounds makes it easier to fight valiantly against difficulty and distress to the best of our ability.*

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*Tolerating and accepting those circumstances we cannot change energizes us to effect and influence those elements within our realm of control.*

### *Initiative*

*Initiative is vital to achieve our objectives, activate change and create a course of action. Initiative gives rise to life's most significant accomplishments.*

*Ideas, dreams and goals are not enough to effect change. One person who takes the initiative to solve a problem is worth more than a thousand who have the intention to resolve the same situation.*

*Initiative comes from a burning desire to produce change and achieve an objective. Hunger, sexual desire and survival all create pressure which influences action. In order to live healthy productive lives, it's vital to resolve the pressure which is present in each of us. Initiative is the ideal response to this pressure.*

*When we are hungry, we seek food. When we feel sexual desire, we seek release. When we are in danger, we seek safety.*

*While initiative which satisfies biological necessities is an instinctive response, initiative to advance professionally or personally is a learned response and more elusive. The pressure we feel when embarking on a new activity or initiating a new journey is more subtle and our reaction to this type of pressure must be developed and nurtured.*

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*We constantly seek pleasure and avoid pain. Starting something new is frequently associated with pain, an uneasy feeling which arises when we venture outside our comfort zone and are exposed to the prospect of failure.*

*Every decision we make in life has a consequence; some are perceived as good and others as bad. Some involve pleasure and others pain. Of all decisions, the decision to do nothing guarantees mediocrity.*

*Taking initiative involves assuming risk, breaking away from the known and leaping into the unknown with decision and action. Assuming this position can be a double edged sword. Family and friends often encourage us to seek the comfortable and convenient, frequently harshly criticizing our stand to deviate from established parameters.*

*Resolve to follow our own path and take calculated risks is essential to soar with the eagles rather than slither with the snakes.*

*Eliciting the guidance of allies who inspire us to take initiative is often critical to our success. Communicating with those who share our vision and desire to create and initiate significant ventures builds strength and confidence. At the same time, it is wise to carefully guard our initiatives and desires from those who do not share our vision and may wish to diminish our desire.*

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*Our creative power is unique. Our capacity to create, imagine and establish new ideas is extraordinary. Confidence in our abilities as well as the initiative to take action nourishes our creative energy.*

## *Temperance*

*Tantalizing temptations abound. Temperance and moderation lead us through a myriad of choices and challenges.*

*Temperance is a noble and steady state of mind which teaches us to avoid excess. We need balance between body and mind. To achieve that balance we must practice restraint in many phases of our lives. To accomplish this tremendous challenge is to be temperate.*

*Life is like a train leading us through many paths. Some paths will bring pleasure, some pain, and some a mixture of pleasure and pain. Whichever path we choose must be chosen with temperance, moderation, care and concern. By recognizing our limitations we will know when to cease doing those things which may bring pain to ourselves, to those we love and to others.*

*As children we are taught to look, listen, and learn. Look to our elders and mentors for guidance; learn from the good fortunes and mistakes of others and always listen to our heart. Good and evil are impossible to separate. Right and wrong are shades of gray which are best managed with temperance and moderation. We can be open, listen to everything and then filter out the excesses whether they be in*

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*conduct, expression, eating, drinking, speaking, acting, working, sleeping or any of the millions of things we do in our daily lives.*

*Excessiveness enslaves our body and mind thereby upsetting and destroying our inner balance. Our lives are like teeter-totters. When we stay in balance neither we nor those on the other end get hurt.*

*We can strive to be active participants and learn to practice restraint. By expanding our experience we also better understand our boundaries. We cannot completely value a walk barefoot through a grassy tree-lined path if we have not similarly walked on the hot, barren concrete road. Life looks to us with splendor one day and can leave us with unspeakable sadness the next, particularly when we are unthinking and intemperate in our choices.*

*Each of us has incredible potential. While there will always be much left unfinished and unrealized, we can soar to great heights by better knowing ourselves and our limitations before we act. We often believe we have no limitations and yet they are ever present. At some time or another we will have questions about our existence; we must, therefore, truly recognize and know ourselves, not as we imagine ourselves to be but as we truly are. Only then will we know the endless chain of events which intemperance can bring when mind and body are not in equilibrium.*

*Temperance is a noble state of mind, which creates the balance necessary to be content and peaceful with our lives.*

## *Usefulness*

*It is virtually impossible to live isolated from the world. Interaction with others is important and necessary. Our success and happiness are a result of our ability to successfully relate to others. Our capacity to be useful to others and help them to satisfy their necessities determines our ability to achieve our goals and objectives.*

*The objective of any profession is to be of service to others. A doctor utilizes his knowledge of the human body to keep people healthy. A carpenter utilizes his hands to construct houses and furniture to make our lives more pleasurable.*

*The more useful we are, the more success we will have. When we give, we receive. The law never fails. The compensation we receive, monetary and otherwise, is in direct proportion to the service we provide. The more service we provide, the greater the rewards.*

*There is a tremendous difference between being servile and being of service. Being servile implies timidity and shyness. Being of service, on the other hand, is helping and assisting others. The perception that one is being servile while being of service is incorrect.*

*The most well known people in the world are those who have discovered means of sharing their knowledge and wisdom. They have*

## Reflections

*a decided impact on humanity. The wise man who hides his knowledge is no better than he who knows nothing.*

*When we share our abilities with the world we are compensated accordingly. The surest way to arrive at the destiny we desire is to be useful and to be of service.*

*All we do is related directly or indirectly with the art of sales. We are constantly selling the idea we are good people, that we deserve the love and respect of others. We also sell goods and services which enable us to acquire that which we need and desire.*

*Selling through trickery and deception may lead to attaining objectives. It is possible to succeed through lies and deception. Initially, it may seem to be the easiest path. We find, however, in the long term we harvest what we plant. More often than not, fraudulent strategies fail and fall like a house of cards. Meanwhile, opportunities abound for those who are transparent and honest.*

*We gravitate towards those relations which cause pleasure. Those who transmit an attitude of service and utility are those who attract life's abundance and prosperity. They are respected and sought in times of calamity and crisis.*

*To be useful to our family, friends, and humanity leads us to achieve what we desire in life. As sure as the day follows the night, a positive attitude of usefulness and service leads to success and happiness.*

## *Desire*

*Desire inspires us to establish goals and objectives. When we believe our desires are attainable, we create power to achieve them.*

*Decisions we make today create our destiny tomorrow. These decisions are the result of desires and objectives. Without a fixed direction we are a ship on the ocean of change without a rudder. We will surely arrive at an unknown destination.*

*To take control of our destiny, it is essential we have a concrete idea of our objective. When this objective becomes a burning desire, we are driven to take action which launches us in the right direction.*

*Limitations in life are measured by desire. It is impossible to grasp beyond our dreams and desires. Our direction is determined by our aspiration. The fear of wanting too much is often accompanied with the fear of failure. Nevertheless, it is better to try and fail than to never try at all.*

*Failure is simply a temporary detour in the journey of life, a pebble which causes discomfort and which inevitably becomes a distant memory.*

## Reflections

*Visualization is a powerful mechanism which gives substance to dreams and desires. Visualization takes us to the unknown and the known. It is possible to imagine what we desire and have not achieved as well as that we already know. The mind has the power to create and produce incredible imagery. Intense mental images facilitate the formulation of an action plan.*

*The key to effectively using desire, imagination and visualization is coming down to earth after the flight to create a definite action plan which leads us to the destiny we desire.*

*Maintaining an excellent attitude generates clear and concise desires. Concrete objectives create a powerful reason to live. When our desires vanish, it is time to think about how we will leave this reality we call life and pass to another reality which is yet unknown.*

*To desire something with all our heart is also the best way of staying young in body and spirit. While we are on our way towards an objective, we have no time to reflect on what could have been. What happened yesterday is a dream, what comes tomorrow a promise and what we have today a certainty. This instant is the most intense moment of our lives. The dreams and desires we create today give purpose to get out of bed tomorrow to embrace another day.*

*The pessimist says dreams are empty promises while the optimist says dreams are promises yet unfulfilled. Desire allows us to reach for the stars instead of rolling with the rocks. Our dreams and*

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*desires are the seeds of success sown today which grow straight and tall to be harvested tomorrow.*

### *Energy*

*Energy is life and we communicate with the world according to our energy level. Internal energy is a direct reflection of our physical and emotional well-being. When we are physically and emotionally energized, we direct our destiny. When we are physically and emotionally weak, we drift aimlessly in the ocean of change.*

*There are many ways to create energy in our bodies. Two of the best are to eat properly and to exercise. While this is in theory simple and logical, it is in practice difficult and challenging. It is often more convenient to eat poorly and forego exercise than to eat well and exercise. A disciplined approach to eating nourishing food and exercising regularly creates energy.*

*Developing the habit of consuming plenty of fruits and vegetables is the first step towards a healthy body. The plethora of wonderful food is one of life's simple pleasures. It is one of the benefits we, as human beings, have in comparison to virtually any other species. Consuming a wide variety of unhealthy food in excess is initially satisfying and ultimately a disaster. As we create a desire to assimilate fresh fruits and vegetables into our daily diet, we acquire a healthier body and mind.*

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*Physical exercise is initially exhausting and ultimately empowering. Laziness is initially satisfactory and ultimately unproductive. While it is imperative to recharge our bodies to create energy, the best way to achieve this goal is by restful sleep. Strenuous physical endeavor activates our body and creates energy. Using every opportunity during the day to exercise our bodies generates and stores energy for future use.*

*Stretching our body in the morning, using our muscles to pick up an object instead of dragging it, walking to our destination rather than riding and utilizing our muscles as they were designed to be used creates physical energy. Small things we do on a daily basis to exercise our body make a tremendously positive difference in our overall energy level.*

*Generating the right emotional state to create positive energy is more elusive. We are taught how to read, write and do arithmetic; seldom are we taught how to manage our emotions. Developing positive emotional energy can be the result of positive constructive internal dialogue.*

*When we tell ourselves things are terrible and will only get worse, we find a way to fulfill that prophecy. When, on the other hand, we tell ourselves things are not the way we want them yet, and that we have the power to create positive solutions, we also fulfill that prediction.*

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*From the moment we wake up in the morning until we sleep at night, our mind is constantly analyzing and evaluating information. When we consciously empower our internal dialogue to focus on solutions instead of problems, we positively energize our emotions.*

*Physical and emotional energy are the fountain of life.*



#### XIV. Years later...

Juan José lowered his gaze from the sky and saw his grandson playing.

He said to his wife, “María Antonieta, our life in The Capitol has been spectacular and we have made an incredible life in the city. At the same time, I always love to come to the country, especially to this house which reminds me of Gramps. What do you think of our grandson playing in the garden?”

“I think your blood runs through his veins,” she said laughing. “I am afraid he is just as mischievous, handsome and intelligent as his grandfather.”

“After so many years together, I have come to realize that you are always right, my love!”

## A Special Gift

The small boy looked towards his grandparents, showed them a ball and said, “Catch!”

“Throw me the ball, Juancito,” replied Juan José.

Juan José and María Antonieta were sitting in the same place where 50 years ago Juan José had met his grandfather for the first time. The garden was as well taken care of and as spectacular as the first time he had seen it.

Juan José watched his grandson play with the innocence only a child has and which most adults misplace. He knew the day would come when he also would share the wisdom passed down from his great-great grandfather and his grandfather, Boss, with his own grandson.

Juan José had read Reflections for more than fifty years. He had complied with both the condition and the responsibility his grandfather had indicated. He had restored the small book many years ago because of its tattered condition. He kept Reflections in the night table beside his bed and took it with him whenever he traveled. He took two to three minutes each night to read one of the principles.

He had incorporated the principles into his life and had been a positive example for others. He had gone through many ups and downs in his life, marvelous moments and turbulent times. The principles had helped him to achieve professional and personal success. People respected him for his wisdom, perseverance and gift for doing things others could not accomplish. Each time he had come to a low moment in his life, he remembered he had the power to choose his attitude and this allowed him to continue forward in the face of difficulty.

“Juancito, come here,” said Juan José.

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“Yes, Grandpa.”

“I am going to stretch and watch the sunset. Would you like to join me?”

“Of course, Grandpa, you know I love to join you when you do your exercise! Are you going to join us, Ama?”

“I will let you kids play,” responded María Antonieta with a smile. “I am going to read before it gets dark.”

Grandfather and grandson walked to the grass hand in hand. They took off their shoes and shirts, looked to the horizon and observed the sun as it moved on its steady path which magically turned late afternoon into early evening. The clouds shimmered orange and purple on the horizon. Juan José considered the beauty of the garden and reflected on his life.

“Juancito, I would like for you to remember something.”

“What is it, Grandpa?”

“Remember, an excellent attitude towards life is the most important thing we can have.”

“I know, Grandpa. You always tell me the same thing!”

Juan José laughed. His grandson was right. He had told him the same thing since the day he was born. He had experienced the profound difference an excellent attitude had made in his own life as the most important factor in living a plentiful and productive life.

“I just want to make sure you carry the idea in your heart forever...”

# End

Rob will be happy to meet with your organization, group or school to inspire excellence, enhance productivity and improve morale by discussing the principles presented in A Special Gift

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Note: Un Don Especial, the original version of this book is published in Spanish by Júpiter Editores. It contains one additional principle not contained in the English version.

## *Confidence*

*People who attain personal and professional success are very confident in themselves. Confidence is developed by experience, preparation, perseverance and a positive attitude.*

*The more experience we have, the more confident we will be. When we do something for the first time, we lack confidence even when we have all the necessary tools. It is only realizing the task several times that we gain higher levels of confidence.*

*Most believe experience comes only with time. We learn much from time and it is a great professor. What is not so evident is that we can energize our experience today to create more confidence for tomorrow.*

*When we take risk, break routine and do something extraordinary, we augment our experience immediately. The more risk we take, the more experience we gain. We can let time be the master of our experience or we can energize our experience today to create confidence tomorrow.*

*Preparation is another fundamental element to acquiring more confidence. Regardless of the objective, we can take action to be more*

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*prepared. Preparation takes time, hard work and constancy while paying tremendous dividends in confidence and success.*

*It is easiest to go into a situation with knowledge already acquired and manage problems as they arise as best we can. On the other hand, when we enter the same situation with higher levels of preparation, we go in with increased confidence to manage any situation and to direct the process to achieve that which we desire.*

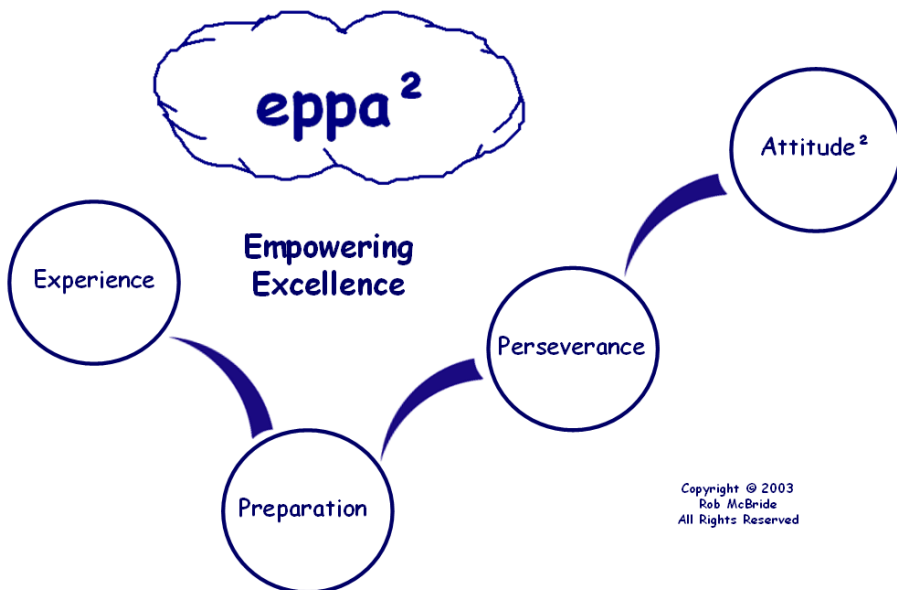
*Perseverance also increases our confidence. Perseverance, achievement and confidence are tightly intertwined. When we persevere, we achieve our objectives and increase our confidence. The opposite is also true. When we give up and don't achieve our objectives, our confidence plummets. By persevering in the most difficult situations life presents, we assure confidence and success.*

*The most important factor in achieving a high degree of confidence is maintaining an exceptional positive attitude. Attitude is an exponential factor in the negative and the positive.*

*An excellent positive attitude allows us to achieve our objectives despite a lack of experience, preparation or perseverance. A negative attitude stops us short even though we have experience, preparation and perseverance. Confidence and attitude are inseparable.*

*Our confidence is evident in our behavior and our energy. Confidence with humility attracts opportunities and circumstances which lead us to achieve our goals and objectives.*

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