



## **Message from the CEO of Bronx-Manhattan North Association of Realtors: A Vet's silence - by Eliezer Rodriguez**

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It's wonderful when an event comes together and the end result fills your heart joy. My son, Miguel, has helped me heal many of my life's scars. Several years after my son started attending P.S. 108, he asked me to attend a Veteran's Day event at his school, P.S. 108. I hid behind my obligations in court and told him I was busy that day and could not attend.

In 2012, my now 10-year-old son, once again asked me to attend the Veteran's Day event at his school. He told me, "Please Papi, other parents attend." I did attend the Veteran's Day event and when I walked into the gym, my son saw me and smiled. The program was magnificent! For the first time, I felt proud to be a veteran albeit, a peace time veteran.

Later that evening, Miguel asked me, "Why didn't you stand when the principal asked, Papi?" For the first time in 30 years, I spoke of my military experience and answered all of my son's questions. Miguel listened with great interest.

A week later, my wife, Lisa, Miguel and his brother, Cristian and I were attending an award ceremony in Pittsburg, PA., hosted by The Black Belt Hall of Fame. My two boys, age 12 and 10, are both registered Black Belts in Tae Kwon Do. That night, they were going to receive the 2012 U.S.A. International Martial Arts Students of the Year Award. At the award reception dinner, the host dedicated the event to all the veterans. He then asked, "If you served your country, please stand." Miguel noticing that I was not going to stand, touched my hand and said "Papi, please STAND." To appease my son, I stood for the first time; for his sake. The thunderous applause that followed was heart felt and for the second time, I felt my service was appreciated.

Miguel was the first person who told me to stand. Just when you think kids don't understand, they surprise you. A few months later, Miguel presented me with a poem that captured the discussion we had about my military silence. He wanted to frame the poem and present it to the Veteran's group that visited his school that day. That presentation had not happened yet.

In 2013, when I began my "tour of duty" as the new CEO for The Bronx Manhattan North Association of Realtors (BMNAR), P.S. 108 invited me to attend their Veteran's Day event. I went and when I was asked to stand, I stood and introduced myself as Sergeant Rodriguez. Once again, the students did a magnificent job paying tribute to the men and women who served in our armed forces. I must confess, I shed a tear or two. I sent the school principal, Mr. Sperazza, a thank you letter for the invitation and to share with him the influence his Veteran's Day event had on my son.

Nearly six years later, on October 15th, 2019, I received a text message from Ms. Mack, Miguel's gym teacher at P.S. 108, asking if I would be the guest speaker at their Veteran's Day event on November 8th. They requested I tell Miguel's story. That same day, BMNAR's newly elected president, Vincent Buccieri from Today Realty Corp., sent me a text. The text read: "For my first act as BMNAR's 59th president, I want to pay tribute to our veterans. I have arranged for The New York Army Reserve, Alpha Company Recruiting and Retention Battalion, to perform a white glove ceremony to raise our new flag on November 8th." He went on to write, "We must always pay respect to the men and women who fought to make the U.S.A. the land of the free and the home of the brave. God bless America!"

November 8th finally arrived and I told Miguel's story to a gym full of students, and veterans from various branches who had served in various wars. I told them how Miguel got me to stand and be recognized for my service to the U.S.A. My two sons, Miguel and Cristian, surprised me by attending the event; luckily, they were both off from school. It was important to let the students know that their program has made a difference; and, because of their program, I have been standing ever since.

My presentation was well received and after seven years, Miguel presented his poem to the Bronx Veteran's Museum. Once again, P.S. 108 did a great job honoring our veterans. The student's program brought tears to the eyes of many. Miguel also presented P.S. 108 with a copy of his poem.

After my presentation, I returned to my office to witness the program Vincent had arranged. The white glove ceremony to raise a new flag was a first for BMNAR. The sidewalk was crowded with invited guests and onlookers. Councilman Fernando Cabrera was kind enough to attend the ceremony and share a few words. What a wonderful day I witnessed to honor our veterans. A big thank you to Vincent and P.S. 108 for making this day a very special one.

Before closing, I want to remind you to get your tickets for our Holiday Party and Toy drive on December 12th, 2019, at the luxurious Marina del Rey. Please call (718-892-3000) for more information and for sponsorship opportunities.

I want to close this article with my son's poem entitled:

#### A Vet's Silence

I never knew my father served,  
He never said a word.  
When I asked on Veteran's Day,  
This is what my dad had to say.  
Yes, my son, I am a vet,  
Four years of my life the U.S. did get.  
The fear of war I embraced,  
On two occasions I nearly faced.  
But the threat of war was erased.  
Not a single war in my tour,  
I'm a peace time veteran forever more.  
We are free my son,  
So far, democracy has won.

Yet, there is a lack of respect for those who served,  
That is why, my son,  
I never said a word.

By Miguel Clemente Rodriguez

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