

“lost” me because it is where I received the education that has been the foundation for my success. Well, that, and my very strong minded parents pushing me hard. I bring up being “lost” by Mercy College because it has been a theme in my life, which not only motivates me, but was what ultimately drove me to succeed in business.

I am 1 of 13 children, and as you can imagine I often felt “lost” within my own family. I remember on the day of my high school graduation that my family was so excited to celebrate my graduation that they forgot me at the ceremony, leaving me to walk home alone – in cap and gown. I still don’t forgive you guys [family]. Every car that passed me was filled with my friends and their families, stopping to ask why I was walking. I laughed and told them that I was forgotten. You sure do develop quite a sense of humor with 12 brothers and sisters.

After high school, I found myself “lost” again; uncertain about life and what I wanted to do. I was expected to go to college and went to SUNY Abany. I quickly found that it wasn’t for me. I wasn’t focused on education and being away from home for the first time I was “lost” among

the many students at SUNY Albany and uncertain about my future. I decided to come home after my first semester to find myself.

My parents, understandably, were not happy to see me. We had rules at home. Rule 1, your stay at home was temporary and rule 2, you either worked, went to school or both. Me, I did nothing. I am the jokester of the family and decided to test the system. I drove my parents crazy.

Every time I left the house, my mom would ask where I was going. I told her I was “going to find Julio”. After many weeks of not finding Julio I came home and told my parents that I found him. He’s in college and has a job. I told her “you’re looking at the newest security guard for Mercy College!” My mother’s head dropped... not exactly what she had in mind about work or school, or both. She had that look on her face “Boy, if I can get my hands on you, I could end your life right now”. I quickly moved away from her before she hit me. Some weeks later my mom came to me calmly and said the words that changed my life. She said – **“without an education you will be nothing, zero, nada”**.

My parents understood the American Dream [I sure didn't] and they knew that our way out of poverty was through education. I learned a great lesson – **you don't need material wealth to give someone a chance to experience all the opportunity in the world, opportunity is free.**

Coming from a large family, with parents from Puerto Rico that spoke little English, you can imagine that we did not grow up with very much. But my parents gave us everything- love, support, encouragement and instilled in us the value of education.

My mother's words **“you will be nothing, zero, nada”** angered me at first, but then inspired me to be someone, to find myself and succeed in life. **I wanted to make my parents proud of the son they raised.**

I enrolled at Mercy College as a student, retiring early from security guard duty, and focused my efforts on getting through the accounting program with a perfect score. Well, almost perfect. I remember taking 18 credits in one particular semester. I was taking advanced income taxation, advanced

accounting, advanced calculus, and other advanced courses [yes, I was a dork] with one intermediate course to ease my load. I got an A in all the advance courses and a B in intermediate Spanish. I showed my mother my grades expecting her to be proud and instead she looked at me like I had two heads and said “I can’t believe you failed Spanish”. **Did I mention that my mother only spoke Spanish?** To this day, that’s a sore spot for me. I think about taking Spanish again but worry that my grade would be even worse.

That aside, I spent many nights in the library and studying at home. Late at night, my siblings would find me asleep with my head on my books. I was often teased by my brothers for staying home with my parents and studying while they partied as most 20 year olds do. But if you look over to tables [1] and [2] you’ll see where all that partying gets you...kidding!!!

I made many sacrifices and studied hard to find myself. I realized that my parents were right and education is the foundation for success. Although my parents and my sister, Zinia, have recently passed away, I know they are watching over me and proud that I made something of myself. My mom is

probably laughing that her jokester son is being honored on April fool's Day- it's kind of ironic. In their honor, I established a scholarship for Peekskill high School graduating seniors called The Jose Rodriguez and Ana Maria Garcia Memorial Scholarship to give underprivileged Peekskill students a chance at education. It's the least I can do to honor my family.

I am standing here tonight because of the Mercy College scholarship program. I am thankful to everyone here tonight for supporting this event and helping students who may not otherwise have a chance to earn a degree.

Before I go, I just want to take a few minutes to thank a few, among many, that have inspired my career.

To Richard Schecter, Partner at Ernst & Young, who gave me my first job out of college. I am grateful to you. You started my career at Ernst & Whinney and many times I know you wanted to end it too. I know you are retiring this year after a great career at Ernst & Young and I will gladly carry your torch for you for many years to come. Thanks for not giving up on me.

To Bill Donaldson, Former Chairman of the U.S. Securities & Exchange Commission and founder of Donaldson, Lufkin & Jenrette (DLJ). It was great experience working at DLJ which was a turning point that focused my interests in alternative investments. I thank you for starting such a great firm and glad to be working with you again as Chairman of our Advisory Council at Perella Weinberg Partners.

To Joe Perella, Founder, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Perella Weinberg Partners, for being a “first class” mentor to me. It’s amazing to me that the poor, skinny kid from Peekskill is working with along side a Wall Street legend (like Joe Perella) and living a dream come true. I am grateful for the opportunity you have given me and proud to be a Partner at Perella Weinberg Partners.

Funny thing, my brothers sometimes remind me that I’m not skinny anymore and I remind them... I’m not poor either. 😊

I see many of my colleagues from Perella Weinberg Partners here tonight and I am honored that you are here to support me. Thank you.

Lastly, and most importantly to me

To my family – I want to thank you all for being there for me. I know it hasn't been easy, and sometimes I know I can be difficult to deal with (well sometimes), but tonight is a celebration of how far we've come from our humble beginnings in Peekskill. Tonight is a celebration of what Mom and Pop began so let's continue and see how far we can go.

To my wife, Elisa, and my girls [Isabella, Olivia, Sofia & Arianna [Arianna is not here tonight]]. I know it hasn't been easy for you while I worked all the time. I will work harder to get home earlier and to see you all. Girls, I hope I can be as successful with you girls as grandma and grandpa were with me. **Education is the key to life.** But let's not grow up too fast. Take your time getting to

college. And don't worry so much about college, because Daddy's going with you. Mommy will tell you I'm not kidding. Hehe

And, last but not least, I want to thank the Board of Trustees – past and present, Mercy College – Dr. Feroe, Glenn Miller and Ashley Witzenberger (my new friends), the Mercy College Accounting Dept., faculty and staff, **including the security guards**, for the hard work of making tonight such a success.

To the students, Mercy is a great school and it's up to you to take advantage of your time there. **This is your opportunity.** Try not to get “lost” too many times in the process.

Thank you very much and have a good night.