

LET'S HEAR IT FOR TONY

by Marie Coady

Tony Colon is a man of simple tastes. He doesn't envy the owners of shiny cars and fancy clothes. His pot of gold at the end of the rainbow is family. Time spent throwing a ball around with his son and helping out his daughter's softball team are Tony's shiny cars and fancy clothes.

He didn't learn about being a father from his dad though. His father didn't throw a ball around with him, but he always remembered how much he would have liked him to. He does remember his mom telling him how she came to America alone, leaving family behind and working any job she could find until she could send for them. It was his mother's fine example that instilled in Tony a strong work ethic.

Tony also believes in the sanctity of marriage. He works extra hard at being a good husband to Lucy. Tony and Lucy were just seventeen when they got married. No one held out much hope for their marriage. The statistics are against a hasty teen marriage, but the statistics didn't know Tony very well. This January Tony and Lucy will be celebrating their twelfth wedding anniversary.

It's been Tony's determination that has kept him going, but at seventeen, with a wife and new baby depending on him, it meant Tony had to give up some things, like proms, football games and most importantly, graduation day. He had to leave the teen world behind and get a full-time job. No way his wife and child would go without, but with no high school diploma Tony found that the only work he could get was full of long days and back breaking labor, working outdoors in blinding heat and bitter cold.

The weather has no mercy on those who work outdoors, but Tony's not complaining. He feels he makes a good living for Lucy and his two children. Tony and Lucy own their own home, and while his friends are refinancing their mortgages to buy new cars and take vacations, Tony is concentrating on paying off his mortgage.

Of course, Lucy works hard also. That's the only way they can afford to send their kids to private school. Tony and Lucy are making the sacrifices necessary to guarantee that the next generation does better than they did.

After a long day at his job, Tony is covered with dust and hardened cement chunks. Lucy doesn't let him in the house until he shakes off most of the days labors and goes straight to the shower.

Now you'd think after a day like that, all Tony would want to do is flop in front of the TV with a cold beer and not move until bedtime. But Tony has another passion. He believes in education, and he puts his time and effort where his mouth is. That's why every Tuesday and Thursday night for eight weeks Tony showered, put on a clean shirt and pushed himself out the door to come to the GED class at Woburn's Adult Evening School.

So far Tony has passed four of the five exams necessary to reach his goal. All that's left for Tony to master is Math, and you all know how that is. With math you either use it or lose it.

That's why Tony came to class every Tuesday and Thursday night through spring snowstorms and torrential rains---to hone his Math skills. Tony is now a hair's breath away from getting his GED diploma.

Tony's gentle manner and firm handshake made him very popular with his fellow classmates. As a trusted member of the class, he was the one who Adele turned to in her time of need. Adele came to America alone from El Salvador at age thirteen, seeking a better life. It has not been easy for her to catch up. She turned to Tony, and only Tony, to ask for a ride one stormy night. She had been walking from Wilmington every Tuesday and Thursday night to get to class. This night she was tired, because she had worked twelve hours that day cleaning hotel rooms. Tony seemed amazed at her determination, unaware there were those who admired his determination as well.

Some may wonder why Tony would even bother to get his GED diploma when he already has a good paying job and owns his own home. As Tony explains it, he wants to set a good example for his children by showing them how much he values education.

**As you can see, Tony doesn't need anyone's sympathy. He's doing just fine.
What he does need is your applause. Let's hear it for Tony.**