

In Memoriam: Sergio Gaitán ¹

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Sergio Gaitán, former president of MEXTESOL and second vice president of TESOL (1989-1990) died on August 27, 1996. At the time of his death, he was Head of the Center for Educational Technology Services at the Milbank Library at Teachers College, Columbia University. He had first come [to New York] to begin his doctorate in TESOL as a Fulbright scholar in 1982, after serving as academic director of the Instituto Mexicano Norteamericano de Relaciones Culturales in Mexico City, Mexico.

To friends such as Ann Wintergerst, current president of NYSTESOL, Sergio Gaitán is remembered as an inspiring teacher, a talented organizer, a cherished colleague, and a compassionate, insightful, and loyal friend. “He was always a good listener. He always knew what to say and how to generate optimism in what appeared to be a difficult situation.” Ann and others in the Teachers College community marveled at his inner strength, at his ability to make others feel comfortable.

When other friends were asked, “What words come to you when you hear Sergio’s name?” no one had to pause before responding. In addition to compassionate, insightful, loyal, these words keep being said: “supportive, positive, energetic, supportive,” again, “lovely, helpful, positive,” again, “gentle, insightful, loyal,” again and again.

But referring to what friends said as words is really inadequate to describe what we gained from Sergio. *Gifts* would be the better word. He shared these gifts every time he asked, “How are you?” or “How may I help you?” or “What can I do for you?” When he said these words he did so with such love and excitement that it was hard to believe at first that we were all experiencing reality especially in New York. After all, we hear these words all the time. People are taught to utter the words when answering the phone, when responding to inquiries at offices, and in chance meetings. But when Sergio said these words, they were not the words we had heard hundreds of times before. In these few, simple words, we all felt the energy, the excitement, the support, the gentleness, the wisdom, the optimism, that his friends

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mentioned when I asked, “What words come to your mind when you think of Sergio?”

“Heart to heart speaketh” was the motto that John Henry Newman chose when he was named cardinal decades ago in England. Sergio’s life lived this motto. “How are you? How may I help you? What can I do for you?” said with love and acted upon with love--what an amazing gift.

Note: Sergio Gaitán will be remembered by all his friends and all the people whose lives he touched. Rest in peace, Sergio--The Editor.