

The University of Texas System Administration



Realizing the American Dream

Honor the Past by Safeguarding the Future



Herlinda Aguilar Wilkinson

Educational goals and dreams should not be deferred.

In 1978, Cornelio Briseno made an investment in education that pays dividends today and will continue to do so into the foreseeable future.

When his granddaughter needed a loan so she could attend The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), Briseno reached into his pocket and drew out a one-hundred dollar bill. He reasoned that if Herlinda (Linda) Aguilar could fulfill her educational aspirations, the American Dream for the Briseno family could be realized.

Her grandfather's philanthropic inclination made a deep impression on Linda, and years later, after having graduated from UTSA, and after having met and married William V. Wilkinson, she pledged to support others in the pursuit of their educational dreams. "My husband and I decided that we needed to help students so they wouldn't have as difficult a time as we did obtaining our degrees," says Linda.

Her husband, who was the first chair of the Criminal Justice Department at The University of Texas at Brownsville, died in 2006. Linda established The William Van Wilkinson and Greater Texas Foundation Scholarship Endowment for Criminal Justice the following year. "I honored the pact I made with him," she says.

The name of the endowment reflects Linda's desire to pay homage to a man she truly admired.

"My husband put so much into the university. I wanted the endowment to be about him."

Six years later, Linda would be inspired to establish another endowment to support the initiatives of the UT System Chancellor. After having spent most of her working life in education—she was an elementary school teacher and administrator, as well as a programs specialist for the Texas Education Agency—she saw, firsthand, the need to promote educational excellence in Texas.

She created the Herlinda Aguilar Wilkinson Chancellor's Excellence Endowment and became a founder for The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Medical School because she wanted to champion the educational programs that will, ultimately, enable alumnae to make "positive and long-lasting contributions" to Texas and the world. She wanted to support educators who could "foster human understanding, respect and tolerance.

The Herlinda Aguilar Wilkinson Chancellor's Endowment enables alumnae to make positive and long-lasting contributions to Texas and the world.

Linda wanted to ensure that those seeking higher education found encouragement and assistance. "It can be a long educational road for any student with a dream, especially if they do not have the financial or institutional support they need," says Linda. "Educational goals and dreams should not be deferred."

Her perspective stems from personal experience. From a very young age, Linda knew that she would someday earn a doctorate. What she couldn't know was the determination she would need to fulfil this dream. Although she earned two master's degrees in relatively quick succession from The University of Texas Pan-American and UT Brownsville (1990 and 93, respectively), it would be another 18 years before she would attain a Ph.D. in educational administration from The University of Texas at Austin (2011).

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The years she spent in pursuit of her doctorate were arduous. It wasn't unusual for Linda's day job to extend to 60-plus hours a week. That unforgiving schedule, along with her need to attend UT Austin at night, required that she live in Austin and travel home to her husband in Los Fresnos every other week. She almost gave up—twice, in fact—but she soldiered on through her husband's death and her grief, propelled by her seemingly endless store of motivation.

Despite the hurdles, Linda recognized that her story was all too common. "There are many stories just like this one. They are not unique to my family or culture." She is extremely gratified, therefore, when she receives heartfelt thanks from students at UT Brownsville who have benefitted from her husband's endowment. Linda feels a kinship with many of the scholarship recipients, whose familial and work responsibilities make attending college challenging.

Today, Linda makes her home in Wimberley with Mark Lee Adleman, a 1972 UT Austin graduate. She calls her six-acre ranchette, which lies close to the Blanco River, "Rancho Serenity—Where Heaven Meets Earth." She has come a long way from what she has described as her "humble beginnings," but she has never forgotten her Papa's faith in her. That first act of generosity, along with the encouragement and support of her husband and so many others over the years, strengthens her resolve to make a difference.

"Our current and future students will continue to need financial backing, institutional support and innovative programs to make their own way in this awesome, but challenging world," Linda says. "I am truly blessed to be able to help in any way that I can."

Faith in Education, Faith in Family



Cornelio Briseno put his faith in the promise of education.

So strong was his belief, in fact, that when Herlinda (Linda) Aguilar Wilkinson lost her prized high school ring, awarded to her upon graduation, her "Papa" made sure to replace that treasured symbol of progress.

A naturalized American who immigrated to the United States during the 1910 Mexican Revolution, Briseno would later found the first Mexican school in an area located just north of what is now La Blanca, Texas.

Years later, as she reached the pinnacle of her educational journey, Linda looked back and thanked her Papa for his unwavering faith in her.

In her dissertation, which was dedicated to her beloved husband, her mother and siblings, and to her grandfather, Linda acknowledged that her Papa's encouragement gave her the courage and resilience she would need to complete her journey: "This dissertation represents the culmination of one hundred years of inherited educational expectations . . . to do well and succeed in the new country."