



Eduardo Padrón

UPFRONT

LIFE REALLY IS FRAUGHT WITH CONTRADICTIONS. Our very own nature is on one hand a homebody, rooted and stable, yet beckoned by the dreamer who would upend all that is fixed and assumed. We are gardeners and astronauts in the same body sometimes, and this is our dance. It's quite okay.

What is not okay are the contradictions we invent. We, the people of the Earth, that is, conjure the most intractable, often the most deadly dilemmas.

mate goal, Ramos responded, "To work for NASA, have a wife, two kids, vacations every year, a nice home, and yes, a white picket fence around it."

At night, Specialist Ramos and his fellow soldiers turn down the lights to avoid being easy targets. In day-

light, he has witnessed his friends lose life and limb. This is his learning environment. This is where he explores ethics, biological phenomena and the social dynamic. It's enough to drive you crazy.

Years ago, a young Scottish psychiatrist spoke to the radical contradictions in human affairs.

In the *The Politics of Experience*, R. D. Laing threw the switch on our notion of "normal" behavior.

"Normal men have killed, perhaps, 100,000,000 of their fellow normal men in the last 50 years," he wrote. "The condition of being asleep, of being unconscious, of being out of one's

mind, is the condition of the normal man."

Laing, of course, was vilified. You cannot turn the world upside down without offending those who hold it upright. But Laing, who died in 1992, would have understood Juan Ramos' fear of ending up lost. You can bet he would be asking a few sobering questions today. Is it sane to live by the whisper of breath, yet foul the air with toxins? Wise to pollute the land and water designed to nourish our bodies? Ingenious to act out our animosities in the name of a partisan god? Down what dark alley of logic, Laing would wonder, did we part with our understanding, our humanity, our kindness?

If we are, indeed, the stewards of this absurd catch-22 universe, what do we do now? I'm an educator who spends his days amidst gifted young people. While their elders debate the politics of separation, they remain formative in their thinking, untethered to ideology. They are the hope, disposed to real learning, the moment when it is ultimately

about transformation, about bridging the critical gap between what they think and what they know in the deeper reaches of their lives. R. D. Laing fills in the rest: "What we know is less than what we love: what we love is so much less than what there is. And to that precise extent we are so much less than what we are."

I'm hoping that Juan Ramos gets to be all he can be. I hope he has the chance to learn in peace, that he gets home safely. I hope he gets that white picket fence. **H**

Now the sun's gone to hell
And the moon's riding high
Let me bid you farewell
Every man has to die
But it's written in
the starlight
And every line on your palm
We're fools to make war
On our brothers in arms

From "Brothers in Arms" by
Mark Knopfler

Dr. Eduardo J. Padrón is president of Miami Dade College, the largest institution of higher education in the nation.

IF WE ARE, INDEED,
THE STEWARDS
OF THIS ABSURD
CATCH-22 UNIVERSE,
WHAT DO WE DO NOW?



Consider the predicament of Juan Ramos, a 24-year old mechanical engineering student at Miami Dade College. His course load the past semester included a wonderful range of inquiry: Critical Thinking and Ethics, Biology, Energy in the Natural Environment and Sociology. But Juan Ramos, engineering student, is also Army Specialist Juan Ramos, stationed in the hellish contradiction we know as Iraq. Yes, that contradiction—life investing in death.

"My online courses are for my sanity, my peace of mind and to give me direction and purpose when I get out. I am afraid of ending up lost like many post war vets."

Asked via e-mail his ulti-