

By Christopher Burnett | Staff Writer

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Spouse pens bilingual children's books

Fort Leavenworth spouse has combined her love of writing with her love of teaching to pen the "Children's Book Project."

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A Fort Leavenworth spouse has combined her love of writing with her love of teaching to pen the Children's Book Project, a series of books in English and Spanish for elementary school students.

Mercedes Carolina Nieves is a lawyer by training, but came to teaching by choice and has been writing since she won a prize for a story at age 7. Her Children's Book Project includes lesson plans that correlate with each of the three books. Teachers in the classroom and parents at home are able to use the lesson plans.

Her husband, Lt. Col. Morgan Southern, is assigned to the Training and Doctrine Command Capability Manager Mission Command/Command Post.

"Mercedes is very focused on child development and education in this series, which is always very valuable to society. I'm impressed with how well she has balanced this project within the context of military life," Southern said. "Moving due to my career, adding our daughter Montserrat to our family, and yet it only took about two years for her to put this series of educational books together."

Nieves said that being active in teaching has allowed her to observe how a lack of effective educational tools, or their untimely delivery, can impact long-term educational development and thus the potential path to a college education for some students.

"While still working for a law firm in Los Angeles, I became involved in the education field during my personal time. I taught within Los Angeles and Ventura County schools of the Los Angeles Unified School District," Nieves said. "I taught classes to parents of various cultural backgrounds whose students ranged in age from elementary school through high school."

She also said that becoming a teacher of parents was by choice. Although students often participated and were always welcome in her sessions, Nieves focused on teaching parents effective techniques that would help them reinforce good study habits in their children at home.

"My most fulfilling experiences teaching in California were not only working with parents in the classroom, but witnessing the positive effects that parental involvement had on the work of the students," Nieves said. "And, since many of the families were of Hispanic heritage, I thought it would be useful to develop The Children's Book Project as a bilingual series of books in both English and Spanish for elementary school students."

Nieves said every classroom situation was different, requiring that she use various types of tactics to involve parents in the education process.

"I learned to read through the parents' eyes and watch how they reacted to what was being taught. It took three to five minutes during my first class to figure out what their needs were," Nieves said. "I made my classroom a place to exchange knowledge and information."

The Children's Book Project includes written lesson plans as a resource to help promote critical thinking and analysis. The series is published and available for use by any school district or parent. Nieves said there were also many business lessons to be learned, such as when she first approached the school district with her books.

"I simply had not considered writing lesson plans until I gave a presentation for educators and a teacher asked me if I had them. So, I wrote a lesson plan for each book," Nieves said. "Now everyone involved in a child's education, starting with classroom teachers, can use them and the school libraries can have all of the materials. Parents can use them at home."

With a toddler as a major priority in her life, Nieves said the series would be an integral part of her daughter's early education process.

The first book in the series, "The House of Caramel," was written when Nieves was only 7 years old. She said the story won the school writing competition. Nieves has since re-written that first book.

"After my first draft was done, I reviewed it and re-reviewed it," Nieves said. "A few weeks later, I went to my office and started making notes about the next book, 'Layla and the Magician,' which has part of my childhood personality reflected in the character of Layla."

The third book, "In The Land of The Butterflies," is based on a class she taught to parents in a rural area of California's Central Valley, Nieves said.

"The series is offered in both digital and physical product," Nieves said. "Young kids like the paper book and quick access to the illustrations. Older children like the digital and physical."



PHOTO/ PRUDENCE SIEBERT, FORT LEAVENWORTH LAMP

Fort Leavenworth military spouse Mercedes Caroline Nieves has developed the Children's Book Project — a bilingual series of books for elementary school children written in English and Spanish with lesson plans for teachers, available on Amazon.com and BarnesandNoble.com. Photo by Prudence Siebert/Fort Leavenworth Lamp

Nieves said she uses online marketing, word of mouth and book fairs as primary avenues of marketing, advertising and promotion to reach and target her segment of the consumer market.

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