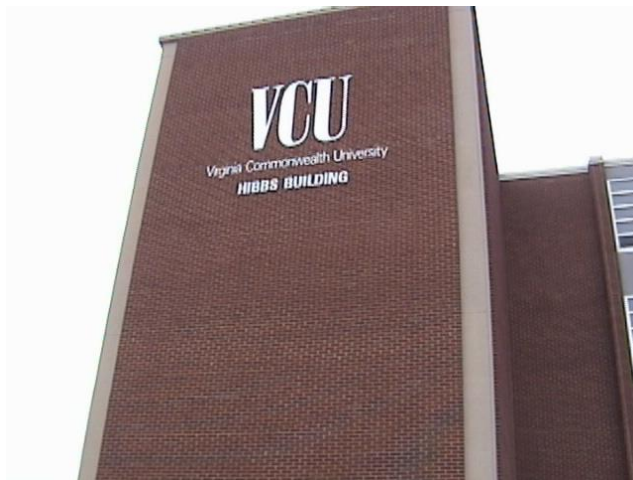


A Drama Student

In addition to hundreds of former students whom I remember with great fondness, a few stand out to be regarded otherwise. One in particular is a young woman I'll call Rosa Gomez, although I've forgotten her actual name. It was decidedly of Latin origin, but she denied this, with a slight accent. Many foreign-background students have said they were embarrassed because they had to study English as a second language; her denial was almost standard, but I tried to help her improve her use of idiomatic English.

She was small, brunette, and very curvaceous. She was obviously placed in the right school - the Arts - and department, Drama. She was incapable of any subtle, self-deprecating action. I had many students from the School of the Arts, enough to classify them as either very good and conscientious, or very uncooperative because they saw no reason to learn anything about writing, one of the few Humanities and Sciences courses they were required to take.

The class met on the second floor of the Hibbs Building, which was adjacent to the Arts complex. The time was ten o'clock, a favored time because it did not demand an "unreasonable" rising hour. Nevertheless, Rosa was habitually late, just late enough that she could make a noisy, carefully posed entrance. I had discussed with her the disruption such entrances made, but she remained unrepentant. Her writing could be graded D+ at best, when she chose to submit any work. In the end, she did not do enough work to pass the course, but she kept attending classes, in her own way, and did take the final examination.



One day, late enough that I had mentally marked Rosa absent, she threw open the classroom door with an unusually dramatic flourish. She stood a long minute, poised in the doorway, right arm curved gracefully above her head, the left hand holding a small notebook. She was costumed in black - tight leggings and leotard. The only relief to this get up was a coarse hemp rope tied loosely about her waist, descending over the left hip to hold a full roll...of toilet paper. She bowed to me, then to the class members, who struggled to stifle their applause, then sat down in the back with a heavy sigh.

We resumed class on whatever the subject was for the day. Ten minutes later, Rosa stood up, strode purposefully to the front, stood next to me, facing the class, unrolled several yards of toilet paper, blew her nose noisily, and resumed her back row seat. The class had been inured to Rosa by half a semester of such incidents, but they did react with a few gasps and chuckles to that performance. Rosa somehow escaped at the bell before I could talk to her. It's just as well; I have no idea what I could have said to her.

There were no more surprises from Rosa until the student evaluations were returned to me the next semester. I always looked forward to these evaluations as a great help to me in continuing to learn my craft. They were, of course, anonymous. However, one evaluation in that set was clearly Rosa's, for she had written in her distinctive hand the following comment: "I cannot give Mrs. Minton anything but a poor rating because she is not a professional. All the rest of my teachers have been professional actors."