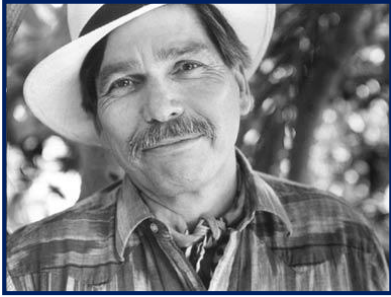


# Giving God a Hand

Victor Villaseñor is a Hispanic writer who is a story in himself. Born in the barrio of Carlsbad, Calif., in 1940, Villaseñor was raised on a ranch four miles north in Oceanside. Since his parents were born in Mexico, Villaseñor spoke only Spanish when he started school. After years of facing language and cultural barriers, heavy discrimination and a reading problem, later diagnosed as dyslexia, he dropped out of high school his junior year and moved to Mexico. There, a woman taught him to read and he discovered a wealth of Mexican art, literature and music that helped him recapture and understand the dignity and richness of his heritage. Ironically, he decided he wanted to become a great writer, and he asked God to help him.



become a great writer, and he asked God to help him.

Villaseñor returned to the United States at the age of 20. He began to feel the old frustration and rage as he once again witnessed the disregard toward poor and uneducated people, and especially toward Mexicans. A chance encounter with James Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* changed Villaseñor's life. It awakened a desire to confront through literature the problems associated with his cultural heritage that continued to plague him.

While Villaseñor worked for 10 years as a laborer, digging ditches and cleaning houses, his mind was free to think and dream up characters and plots. At home, he read voraciously, devouring more than 5,000 books. He memorized favorite openings and analyzed paragraphs and sentences, taking them apart to see how they worked. And most important, he started writing. He wrote nine novels, 65 short stories and 10 plays. He sent them all to publishers. All were rejected. One publisher sent him a rejection letter that simply said, "You're kidding."

Incredibly, Villaseñor was encouraged by that. It meant that at least the publisher had read his submission. Then, in 1972, after 265 rejections, Villaseñor sold his first novel, entitled *Macho!*, which the *Los Angeles Times* compared to the best of John Steinbeck. He then published a nonfiction work called *Jury: People vs. Juan Corona*, an award-winning screenplay called *Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*, and – the crowning work of his life – a two-part saga of his family called *Rain of Gold* that took 12 years to write. Two of his books – *Burro Genius* and *Crazy Loco Love* – have been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize.

A gifted and accomplished speaker, Villaseñor continues to live on the ranch where he was raised.

With a lot of hard work on Villaseñor's part, God answered his prayer.

What about you? God gives each of us a gift or gifts. Have you discovered yours? If so, what are you doing about developing each?

The lesson from the life of Villaseñor is to be diligent in the pursuit of a dream, learn from failures, overcome rejections and work hard.

The Bible has something to say about that: *Do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise* (Hebrews 10:35-36).