

THE F FACTOR

The background of the entire image is a dark blue gradient with a subtle horizontal line pattern. In the center, there is a silhouette of a person from the chest up, holding a professional video camera. The person's hair is slightly messy. The camera has a prominent lens and a microphone. The lighting is dramatic, with a bright light source from the right side, creating a strong glow and highlighting the edges of the person and the camera.

Diane Gonzales Bertrand

THE
F **FACTOOR**

ALSO BY DIANE GONZALES BETRAND

Alicia's Treasure

Close to the Heart

*The Empanadas that Abuela Made /
Las empanadas que hacía la abuela*

El dilema de Trino

Family, Familia

The Last Doll / La última muñeca

Lessons of the Game

El momento de Trino

Ricardo's Race / La carrera de Ricardo

The Ruiz Street Kids / Los muchachos de la calle Ruiz

Sip, Slurp, Soup, Soup / Caldo, caldo, caldo

Sweet Fifteen

Trino's Choice

Trino's Time

Uncle Chente's Picnic / El picnic de Tío Chente

Upside Down & Backwards / De cabeza y al revés

We Are Cousins / Somos primos

THE
F **FACTOOR**

Diane Gonzales Bertrand



PIÑATA BOOKS
ARTE PÚBLICO PRESS
HOUSTON, TEXAS

The F Factor is made possible through grants from the City of Houston through the Houston Arts Alliance and by the Exemplar Program, a program of Americans for the Arts in collaboration with the LarsonAllen Public Services Group, funded by the Ford Foundation.

Piñata Books are full of surprises!

Arte Público Press
University of Houston
452 Cullen Performance Hall
Houston, Texas 77204-2004

Cover design by Mora Des!gn

Bertrand, Diane Gonzales

The F Factor / by Diane Gonzales Bertrand.

p. cm.

Summary: Javier Ávila, a smart but clumsy sophomore at St. Peter's High School, thinks it is a mistake when he is placed in the new course, Media Broadcasting, but over the course of the year, he discovers self-confidence, the value of extracurricular activities, and a talent for broadcast journalism.

ISBN 978-1-55885-598-4 (alk. paper)

[1. Television broadcasting—Fiction. 2. Self-confidence—Fiction. 3. Stereotypes (Social psychology)—Fiction. 4. Catholic schools—Fiction. 5. Schools—Fiction. 6. Hispanic Americans—Fiction. 7. Family life—Texas—Fiction. 8. Texas—Fiction.] I. Title. PZ7.B46357Faf 2010

[Fic]—dc22

2010000645

∞ The paper used in this publication meets the requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

© 2010 by Diane Gonzales Bertrand

Printed in the United States of America

April 2010–May 2010

Versa Press Inc., East Peoria, IL

12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For
Suzanne and Nick

and
to my students
past, present, and future

PROLOGUE

Flashing lights roamed the neighborhood like red ghosts. Emergency vehicles blocked the street. Thick drizzle made for a messy rescue. The crackle of radios, men yelling orders, and the quick appearance of neighbors staring from their porches and standing in their front yards made Javier Ávila think he was watching a movie. But when the emergency technicians placed a mask over his friend's face, Javier knew he wasn't looking at a screen with carefully edited images for dramatic effect. This crisis was in-your-face reality.

"Why don't you open your eyes? Can't you hear all the noise?" Javier whispered. He stood a few feet away, living the surreal experience of watching an EMT pressing his fingers against pulse points, his friend lying in the wet grass, unresponsive.

Someone tugged Javier's arm. A young policewoman tried to pull him toward the ambulance. He jerked his arm out of her grip. "No," he told her. "I want to stay—" He started coughing and gasping for air. His raw throat, the throbbing in his head; he bent over, gripping his hands on his knees, hoping he wouldn't pass out again.

The woman took advantage of his weak moment and pulled Javier firmly across the yard. Too miserable to fight her, he stumbled toward the ambulance. He looked

over his shoulder one last time. Two men were lifting his friend onto a stretcher.

A thin black man wearing an EMT uniform helped Javier climb into the ambulance and gently placed him on a side bench. In moments, Javier was wearing a plastic mask over his mouth and was told, "Breathe easy. Relax." The technician went on to check his pulse and blood pressure.

Javier saw the old woman sitting across from him, her face streaked with black, her dirty nightgown ragged at the hem. Someone had wrapped her in a blanket and given her slippers that looked way too big for her feet. When she saw him looking, her brown eyes filled with tears. Tears trickled down her weathered dark face. She made the sign of the cross over herself and prayed, "*El Señor es mi luz y mi salvación.*"

Witnessing this act of faith made Javier's breathing easier. He leaned his head back and closed his eyes. *God, please help my friend.*