**15653, Jessica Leon**

Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen,

First I want to welcome my family, my friends, and the teachers, administrators, the Board of Education and members of the press to this wonderful night of celebration. I want to thank My Lord Jesus Christ, for without Him none of this would be possible. I also want to thank my husband Nestor, and my daughter Aliana for their constant love, support, and understanding. I want to thank my mom, my dad, and my sister for always pushing me to be the best that I can be. Mr. Braulio Santiago, who was my first principal, saw something special in me and brought me to Smalley School. I want to give special thanks to my Diloreto School Family, namely Mr. Ortiz, Mrs. Torres, and Mrs. Robles, who believed in me and chose me to represent Diloreto School as the teacher of the year. And, last, but certainly not least, I want to thanks my teammates, colleagues, and friends Joanne Leon and Sorangel (who are like sisters to me) Cristina, Denise, Jovanna, Gisela. Having loved ones like these who stand by you, encourage you and challenge you, are what it takes to become all you can possible be. I would not be standing here tonight without these people standing with me and believing that one day I would be the teacher of the year.

I am truly honored to be named the Teacher of the Year for New Britain, CT School district. This district may be poor in funds but it is rich in spirit. New Britain is known as the city that is the best at getting better. We have a new amazing Superintendent & a young phenomenal mayor. New Britain is on the cusp of becoming the best inner city in CT and I think that with Nancy Sarra (new Superintendent) and Mayor Erin Stewart at the helm, the city is destined for greatness! Thank you both for supporting and encouraging our community and our school district.

There is so much violence, hate and racism in our nation, but I believe change can happen. But it will not happen at the national level first. We must begin to make a difference at the local level. We can begin right in our own communities, even as individuals, to begin to pay it forward and to pass along the good things that have been done to and for us to other people.

I saved a student's life this past year by performing the Heimlich maneuver. He almost choked on a water bottle cap and I am a firm believer in that everything happens for a reason & sometimes terrible things must happen so that something great can come out of it. Perhaps that experience happened so that I could inspire others to Always help whenever the need arises! It was a teachable moment because I told my students to never lose the opportunity to help others in need. I used that experience to do charitable acts of kindness in the community with my students. We made blessing bags for the homeless (they are care packages with everyday toiletries and necessities). I want teachers and my community to do more of that.

We can’t all save someone’s life. But, we can each do something. We can write letters to our soldiers. We can read or create a craft with the elderly in the elderly homes. We can put together care packages for sick children in hospitals or the homeless, or plant a garden to beautify our city.

Every day and night we see on the news another act of senseless violence. Many times it is one group seeking vengeance upon the violent act of another. Only we can put a stop to it by stopping the violence where we live. We can stop it by not seeking revenge ourselves. We can stop it by planning and doing more charitable acts of kindness to those around us and encouraging others to do the same. When our group is at odds with another group, pray about it and see if there is a way around the two sides coming to blows, or at least finding a peaceable solution. Violence only begets violence. This is not going to improve our little town and make other people want to live here.

I saw on the news where a mob went to a political rally with plans to start a riot. But, the police decided to stop it before it started. They had food brought it and held a picnic of both sides. Instead of a riot, there was fellowship. Another place on the news talked of two gangs meeting at the site of a large public gathering. Everyone expected a mob and a riot. But, the two motorcycle gangs decided not to play into the hands of the news and the naysayers. Instead, they met one another with big hugs, not a battleground.

As teacher of the year, I would like to hear about your wonderful and amazing acts of kindness (charitable projects) and I would like to know how it's made an impact in our students & community. I know all of you and I know that you are the type of people who would rather do a charitable act of kindness than to start a public fight. For the rest of this year, I encourage each of you to look for ways to extend charitable acts of kindness to those around you, whether it is by giving a small gift, speaking a work of encouragement, or if it is something grand like saving a life. I can tell you that was a very humbling experience for me.

I guarantee you that if we each concentrated upon doing charitable acts of kindness throughout the day, instead of concentrating on ways to start trouble, then our world and our community would be a safer place to live. I guarantee that if anyone makes this drastic move to put others first and look for reasons to be extend kindness to them, we will all feel better about ourselves and other, and our community will begin to show the happy effects.

I promise if you read the Bible and strive to live by its precepts, the you will be living the life that God ordained for you, regardless of how, or where or when you managed to go left when God said right, and God himself will welcome you home as the prodigal, He will put you in anew gown, new everything just to have you back safe and sound to him.