

The Enrique Camarena Story

Red Ribbon Week



Enrique Camarena never asked to be a hero. All he ever wanted was a chance to make a difference, a chance to somehow help others. But growing up in a poor barrio in Mexico, Kiki must have wondered if he would get those chances.

When Kiki was nine years old, his family moved to San Diego. Kiki worked with the rest of his family in the fields. As he picked peaches and plums, Kiki watched other kids head for school, and he often wondered what it would be like to have a seat on the bus or a seat in a real classroom.

Kiki finally got the chance to go to school, and he became a good student. In high school, he played on the football and basketball teams. He worked on the yearbook. He was even voted "Best All Around Senior".

When Kiki graduated from high school he made a big decision. He saw that his friends were headed for trouble, and Kiki could have followed them. Instead, he worked his way through college and earned a degree in criminal justice.

Kiki served in the Marine Corps. Then he became a fireman, and finally a policeman! And when he saw many of his friends get into trouble because of drugs, he joined the DEA. DEA stands for Drug Enforcement Administration. It's our government's special police force that works to keep drugs from coming into this country.

Kiki knew something had to be done to stop drugs and to help the people he cared about. His mother knew that his work could be very dangerous, and she even tried to talk him out of it. "No", he told her, "even if I'm only one person, I can make a difference."

His mother was right. Kiki's work was often dangerous, and it was lonely too. Old friends turned against him. But Kiki kept on with his fight against drugs.

He was such a good agent that he was sent to work undercover in Mexico. For weeks, Kiki lived among the drug lords. He gathered information and evidence. Just when his work was almost finished, the drug dealers found out who he really was. They kidnapped him. They tortured him. And they killed him. After a month, his body was discovered and returned home to his family.

Kiki gave his life in the fight against drugs. He gave his life trying to help others. To honor Kiki, his family and friends in San Diego wore red ribbons. As his story spread across the country, others began to wear ribbons too. Now, every year millions of Americans celebrate Red Ribbon Week (October 23rd-31st) to remember Kiki and to take a stand - just as he did - against illegal drugs. Kiki set an example for all of us. He showed us how one person can change things. And he became a hero. All Kiki wanted to do was make a difference. We hope somewhere, somehow, he can see what a difference he's still making today.