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ROWS, COLUMNS, AND BROKEN PLANS

Miguel Dantes never put much stock in plans that looked too perfect. He had a degree in computer engineering but ended up at Sulu State College teaching kids in business and social work. He learned early on that life does not usually follow a flowchart. In his Excel classes, he told his students that formulas can do the math but they cannot predict when things go wrong.

He was thirty-eight. He taught Computer 2 and Excel and a class called Living in the IT Era. The school was short on staff so he got moved around between departments a lot. He saw every class as a chance to show them more than just how to use a keyboard. He wanted them to know how to handle change and how to keep going.

One Tuesday morning, Miguel walked into his class with a pile of papers. His students were already there. Some were barely awake and others were hiding their phones under the desks. He told them to put the phones away. They all groaned, but they did it.

He put the sheets on his desk. He told them they were going to use spreadsheets to practice making real decisions. A student asked if they were doing another budget. Miguel said no. He told them this lesson was about plans that fail.

The room went dead silent. He turned on the projector and a blank Excel sheet appeared. The screen filled up with a big grid of white boxes. He said that life looks like that grid sometimes because it seems organized. But then he said that real life does not always fit into those little boxes.

He told the students to type out a plan for their lives. They had to list their career and how much money they wanted to make and when they would graduate. At first, they all worked pretty fast. They typed in dreams about good jobs and making lots of money. Some of them even wrote about moving to other countries or starting their own shops.

Miguel walked around the room and watched them work. Then he told them to stop. He said they had to delete one major part of the plan they just made.

Everyone started talking at once. They were confused. One student asked what he meant. Miguel just said to delete something important, like a dream or a goal.

They started hitting the delete key. You could feel the mood in the room change. People stopped feeling so sure of themselves. Miguel stood next to a student named Rafiq who was just staring at his monitor.

He asked Rafiq why he wasn't deleting anything. Rafiq said that everything he wrote was already going to be really hard to do. Miguel nodded. He asked the boy what would happen if life just deleted those things for him.

Rafiq looked like he didn't know what to say. Miguel told him that life does not ask for permission before it changes your plans.

The room stayed quiet. Miguel clicked a button and showed a file that was messed up. There were error messages in the cells. The formulas didn't work and the data was missing. He said this is what happens when things break and life gets in the way.

Then he asked the class if a broken spreadsheet meant the data was gone forever.

After a second, a girl raised her hand. She said no because you can fix it.

Miguel smiled a little bit. He said that was right. He told them you fix the math and you change the settings and you build it back. He said that is what being strong looks like.

The students sat there thinking about that. He told them to go back and fix their plans. Some of them put back what they deleted. Others changed their goals completely. A few of them started over with a whole new idea.

Miguel saw that they weren't looking at the grid as something that trapped them anymore. They saw it as something they could change. It was a tool they could edit.

When the class was almost over, he asked what they learned. One student said plans are not permanent. Another said they are still worth making.

Rafiq spoke up and said he learned that failure is just a broken row and not the end of the whole file.

Miguel was happy with that answer. Before he let them go, he told them that in a spreadsheet you fix an error with a formula. In real life, you fix mistakes with time and effort.

The kids packed up their bags. Miguel stayed in the front of the room. He looked at the empty grid on the screen. His own life was right there in those boxes. Some plans had failed and his dreams had changed a lot since he was younger. He had dealt with plenty of surprises, but he had grown through all of it.

He turned off the machine. The room got a little darker. He whispered to himself that rows and columns were never meant to keep people stuck. He picked up his grading sheets. He looked at the names and saw stories that were still being written, not just a list of scores.

