

What Being a Member of a Union Family Means To Me

Determination and resiliency define the women in my family. I come from a family of immigrant farm workers. My mother was raised in the grape fields of California's Central Valley as a first generation Mexican farm worker. She got up at 4 a.m. to work in the fields before going to school. After school, she went back to the fields until it got so dark she could not see her hands in front of her face. Such were the days when she tried to juggle supporting her family and getting her education.

Labor injustices were prevalent as my family worked in farm labor. It was difficult to see that my mother was not treated fairly as she endured grueling conditions in triple digit heat with no access to water or sanitation facilities. There were times when she was not paid for the work she did simply because the farm owner had a change of heart. Help with injuries at the work place and health insurance were not realities for her. My mother felt powerless until the courageous efforts of Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers movement brought needed relief. Even today, I hear my mother say in times of hardship, "Si Se Puede". After years of struggle and perseverance, my mother received her education and is a State employee today. She wholeheartedly supports her union, never forgetting the labor support she has received since the days of her first employment on American soil as a prideful farm worker.

To be part of a union is to be part of a family. I am my mother's child as well as the child of all of the women in my family that have come before me. I stand on their shoulders. Every day, I keep their sacrifices in mind as I make my decisions. My family's struggles shape my present and my future; their resolve to prevail motivate me to do better every day. I feel the same sentiments for the unions my family members belong to. Just like family, union members stand on the shoulders of those that have come before them and those that have struggled and paved the way. Without them, my family's success would not have been possible.

I would be honored to be selected to receive a Dominick D. Critelli Scholarship from IFTPE because it's ideals are in line with my own - an injury to one is the concern of all. My goal is to pursue a career in law and work within the capacity of government to help end human rights abuses and labor injustices. It is my turn to give back to the union community that has brought me this far.