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What Being a Member of a Union Family Means to Me

Though as a young child I did not know what unions were, or how they affect the lives of millions of workers throughout the world, I did understand their ideals due to my family. In a sense, treating others fairly and standing up for people's rights are ideals embodied by the work and teachings of my parents. My mother, an immigration judge, always works hard to allow people to do the best in their situations, while dealing with hundreds of families' situations of varying, consistent hardship. Though I have only recently come to understand how difficult her work can be, but I always understood that it was important.

My father plays a similar role as an advocate, much like those of a union, for the youth in our city. He is a lawyer through The Door, a legal organization that helps to improve the lives of youths, and works every day to prevent evictions and get people legal rights to apartments of their deceased relatives. In housing, family, and immigration court he advocates for young people who need representation in our system that disadvantages them. He also took me to my first union rally with SEIU and to march to Mayor Bloomberg's mansion. He has always pushed me to be a fair person who works with others toward a goal.

This spirit has most been embodied by my work with AMIGOS de las Americas. I, along with two partners, lived in, worked with and advocated for a small community in Cotopaxi, Ecuador. I became a part of one of the families of the community, the Herrera-Soria, and spent all my time developing their business idea. We worked together build up a chicken cooperative and split the responsibilities of equally amongst members of the community. Finally we went to investors in the area, Fondo Ecuatoriano Populorum Progressio (FEPP) [Ecuadorian Fund for

Popular Progress], to promote the idea of the community. In the end we were able to organize and start the small business through advocating for ourselves.

As I continue my involvement with AMIGOS de las Americas I will continue to work on my leadership and learn through service and work to better the situations of poor workers. I hope to follow the example of my parents and continue to advocate for myself.

As a member of a union family I learned intuitively to work with others and to be my own advocate. And going forward I will continue to advocate for issues I believe in and follow my parents' example to become a member of another family in the form of a union. My mother taught me that her union makes her "happier" with her job and "makes [her] enjoy doing [her] job more." Union membership to me is a way people can make their way toward improvement through coming together which is essentially the spirit of a family, which makes each member of the family feel more secure and content.

The essence of a family and similarly the essence of a union are creating a feeling of security in a world that often feels inconsistent. I am therefore thankful for a family that is involved in a larger family through their unions.