

## MARTIN'S JOURNEY TO THE WHITE HOUSE

Across the alley from our church, the four members of the Martínez family to whom St. Andrew's has given shelter for the past twelve months will be moving on by the end of October. Their sponsor, Compass Housing Alliance, has provided excellent logistical and counseling support. The parents, Martín and Natividad, have both been thoroughly immersed in training and English language courses to equip them for the next phase of their lives. Their youngest son, Brandon, 15, will be a sophomore at Roosevelt high this fall and is on the football team. Martín Jr., 20, has just graduated from Everett Community College and begins this fall as a full-time student on scholarship at Eastern Washington University in Cheney, WA. He has also been working full-time this summer for a construction company and is saving up for college expenses as well as putting money into the bare-bones family budget.

Says Deacon Anne Novak, our early liaison with the Martínez family, "They have been wonderful occupants of Brighton House— very self-reliant, and have never asked for a single thing. I'll be extremely sorry to see them go," she says. Those of us who have had a small part in offering moral support and encouragement to them are humbled by their determination and resolve despite tremendous personal obstacles.

But this writeup is primarily about young Martín, whose outstanding achievements at Everett, and enrollment at EWU this fall are only part of this young man's story and his keen sense of responsibility for his family, his fellow Latinos, and the larger community. In a recent extended conversation with him I learned that he helped organize a trip to Washington, D.C. this past June with some of his fellow students. Their purpose: to advocate in front of the White House for two days, for comprehensive immigration reform. On August 8 I interviewed Martín again at length about this trip and about his own future aspirations.

I should note that Martín is a "Dreamer", the informal name for the granting of legal status to those who came at a young age across the border to the United States, and who have been in school here for at least five years. Two years ago President Obama

established this category by executive order under the Deferred Action Childhood Arrivals Initiative (DACA). Martín qualified.

Q. Martín, while you were a student at Everett Community College you helped organize this trip. Who went, and how did you get there?

A. There were eight of us, and we drove in two cars. Together we raised all the money for our transportation expenses, sleeping in our cars en route across the country. We also paid for a pretty shabby apartment, sleeping there on the floor as well as the beds.

Q. Why did you go, and what did you want to accomplish?

A. As young Latinos now living and studying in the United States, we wanted to go in front of the place where the president lives, to create more awareness of the critical need for immigration reform. But I also can't deny that on the way we enjoyed some sightseeing as we crossed the country for the first time, and I wondered later whether we might have done more than we did.

Q. Say a little about the experience of demonstrating in front of the White House.

A. We were there with our placards for two days, for five hours each day. As we started protesting, several people gave us dirty looks. We listened to verbal abuse—"You're not supposed to be in this country," "Go home, wetback", "You people take our jobs away", "You don't pay taxes", and worse. It felt really bad to actually hear this face to face. But some other people gave us high fives and joined our protesting cause—especially college students. We even had over 80 people protesting with us. That felt really good.

Q. Did any of you visit the offices of Washington's congressional representatives?

A. Yes, we visited the offices of Rep. Suzan DelBene (Dem., District 1), and Rep. Rick Larsen (Rep., District 2). Both representatives spoke personally with us.

Q. What was their response to your advocacy for immigration reform?

A. Rep. DelBene was very supportive; she understood the issue very well.

"Keep pushing for what you want", she told us. And she reminded us that not only Latino immigrants needed our support, but also those from countries other than Latin America. However, after keeping us waiting for an hour, Rep. Larsen gave us

only ten minutes. He told us our cause was useless, that the immigration situation was never going to change.

Q. In this issue of immigration as our country is currently facing it, are there moral or historical reasons why it's important to you personally?

A. First, this affects me and my family personally. Secondly, immigration reform is basically a human rights issue. We immigrants are devalued as human beings; we are deprived of our human rights due to the lack of a social security number.

Another thing regarding the terms "Hispanic" and "Latino". It was Europeans who used the term Hispanic to designate us, giving it a colonial connotation. Latino is a better term; we ourselves began to use it in preference to Hispanic.

Q. How can we in the churches respond better to the issue of immigration reform?

A. First, understand the issue! Create awareness. Educate people. Also the churches can support or join community and other organizations that are supporting immigration reform.

Q. Martín, what are your own personal goals as you set off for Eastern Washington University as a full-time student?

A. First, to get my bachelor's degree. My major will be business management and administration, with a minor in psychology. At Everett I was president of Mecha, a national student group advocating the rights of Latinos. At EWU my classes begin the last week in September. I've already contacted the Mecha chapter there, and they've asked me to be a leader in their group.

Q. Finally, what would you like to do now to continue furthering the cause of immigrant rights?

A. I have a dream: to organize a large event for immigration reform that actually places the students themselves in the leadership of the event, as opposed to just participating.

Thank you sincerely, Martín! It's been a special privilege.

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