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Deborah Gonzalez's Post

Bringing Good Fortune (and New Champions) Into the New Year!

Posted by Deborah Gonzalez on 01/22/2016 at 08:46 AM



Obtaining my law degree and law license were not easy tasks. I went to college and law school in the evenings while working full time and raising a young daughter.

Yet I'm grateful that life has afforded me the good fortune that many others haven't had, such as having been born in the United States. Yes, it was fortuitous that I was born here, as my parents are Brazilian. They came to the U.S. for a better life immediately after their wedding fifty years ago.

And though my siblings and I were born in the U.S., we were fortunate enough to have been raised in Brazil and to have experienced first-hand the life and struggles my parents wanted to get away from. I use the word "fortunate" because I believe that the struggles we lived through in Brazil helped me realize how *fortunate* I really am!

Eventually, my parents brought us all back to the U.S., but not without years of family separation. Thankfully my siblings and I are "anchor babies" (U.S.-born children of undocumented immigrants), and my sister was able to petition for my parents with the help of the Immigration Department at International Institute of Rhode Island (now the Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island) to remain in the United States permanently. Today my dad is a United States citizen and my mom a lawful permanent resident.

All of these events in my life made me realize how fortunate I really am. It was good fortune that I was born in the United States, and it was good fortune that helped me attend college and become a lawyer.

Giving Back



I realize that not everyone is as fortunate as I am, and that's why I believe I have an obligation to help those who are not as fortunate. Certainly I can't help where people are born or whether or not they go to college, but I *can* decide to help someone less fortunate by providing them with free legal services.

It is with all of this in mind that I decided to partner, not only with the **Rhode Island Volunteer Lawyer Program**, but also with the **Pro Bono Collaborative at Roger Williams University**.

With the Pro Bono Collaborative, I have been able to continue to fulfill my desire to give back, by providing educational seminars to immigrant families at Providence and Central Falls Public Schools, as well as provide training to other lawyers who are willing to help the Pro Bono Collaborative with free legal services.

I have worked with [Eliza Vorenberg](#) and [Suzy Harrington-Steppen](#) on a variety of programs; however, nothing gave me greater satisfaction than when Eliza asked me to accompany three law students – **Maria Viveiros '15**, **Ana Christina Maria '15**, and **Alice Cunningham '15** – to San Antonio, Texas, in March of 2015 during the **Alternate Spring Break (ASB) Program**.

Helping Refugee Mothers in Texas



I felt blessed that Eliza thought I was good enough to supervise these young ladies, and that I had been given an opportunity to help the mothers and young children who were being detained by Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) at the Karnes Detention Facility in Karnes, Texas.

The ASB had Maria, Ana, Alice and I working with RAICES (Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services), out of San Antonio, Texas.

Our job was to meet with the mothers at the Karnes Detention Facility and help them prepare for a variety of tasks such as: bond hearings before the Immigration Court, credible fear interviews with Asylum Officers, appeals before the Board of Immigration Appeals for bond denials, and reconsideration requests for credible fear denials.

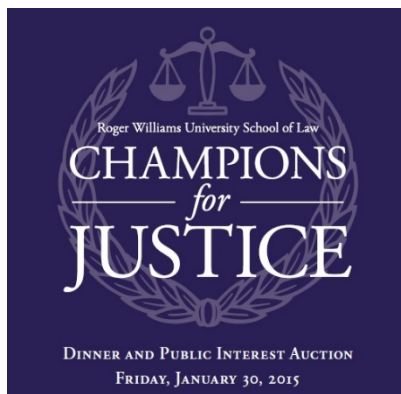
We met with mothers and their young children in concrete cell block rooms that were 8x8. Most of the children were under age 10, playing in the corner of the rooms, on the cold floor, while we interviewed the mothers.

The students and I were taken back by the strength and conviction of these mothers to do whatever was necessary to get their children away from the violence and poverty that they endured in their home countries. All of the women we met with were from Central America, and all were fleeing from either domestic violence, rape, extortion, and/or extreme poverty.

Many of the mothers had travelled by foot and/or car from Central America, carrying only what they had on their backs. Most of the women travelled with more than one child some of whom were as young as 3 months old. Their stories were heartbreaking.

Although I felt sad for what these women had lived through, and that they had not been given the same good fortune that had been afforded to me, I also felt a great sense of accomplishment that I was able to give a week of my time to help these women. I think I can speak for Maria, Ana and Alice when I say that they felt the same as I did. The mothers were very grateful that we were there to help them.

Champions for Justice 2016!



I believe that, as a lawyer, I have an obligation to help those who have not been as fortunate as I have been, and for this reason, it was very odd to me to have been chosen for the **Public Interest Champions for Justice Award** in 2015. I had mixed emotions about it. I was very happy and honored that my peers recognized the work I did, and yet I felt guilty to receive recognition for work I believe have an obligation to do.

However, this year, with new the recipients of the award (**Judge Judy Savage**, the **Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island** (DIIRI), and **Dena Castricone, Esq., '98 L'02**), I now understand the importance of recognizing those in our community who do so much for those who are in need, and I am thrilled to congratulate them!

Judge Savage has done a great deal to educate our legal community on the realities of mass incarceration. **Dorcas International Institute of R.I.** is not only a refugee resettlement organization, but they also provide immigration services, job training, and many other services to the people of our State, and more specifically for my family. **Dena** has been instrumental in fighting for the rights of the LGBTQ community. To all of them, I say:

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I congratulate you all for your work with the community and for the assistance you have provided to the Pro Bono Collaborative, and to those who have not been afforded the same good fortune as we have! Your work is very important. Thank you!