

*“No te preocupes, ellos nos van a ayudar,”* my father reassured my mother. She sat on their bed with a stressed expression and bills scattered all over. Although I wasn’t supposed to be eavesdropping, through the slightly opened door I heard the steadiness and certainty my father’s voice had while speaking to my mother. At this moment, I didn’t fully grasp who “ellos” were, but I could sense the relief his words gave my mother. Only later did I realize that “ellos” referred to his union, the people who would have his back and my family’s too. This moment planted in me a deeper understanding of the power of unity and community; emphasizing the importance of how people standing together can achieve what no one can alone.

My father works as a waiter in a hotel, a job that requires patience, discipline, and adaptability. Hospitality work is unpredictable and often stressful as many experience unstable schedules, tips will vary and job security is never guaranteed. However, because of his union membership, my father’s hard work has truly supported us. His union ensured him fair wages, healthcare benefits and provided the stability that many service workers often lack. That stability also meant that my father had the flexibility to be present in my life in ways that mattered the most. Some of my best memories are seeing him waiting outside school to pick me up. Our car rides became some of my happiest moments, as they are filled with conversations about his work and my school day, and the occasional cream cheese bagel. Sometimes we go on small field trips with my dog to see which park has the smoothest road to rollerblade on. His union not only provided for our necessities, it gave me the gift of my father’s company.

The union’s assistance helped my family even more. My mother suffers from asthma which requires frequent doctor visits but those healthcare benefits have made

her treatment possible. Without the union's support, my parents would have to choose between medicine and rent. The union's stability transformed my father's work from survival into stability, it gave our family dignity and hope.

Beyond this support, my father's union played a major role in shaping my values. When I was a freshman, I remember my father picking me up from school with a concerned look on his face. I had a gut feeling that something was wrong. He revealed to me that he was in a dreadful situation as it was discovered that his job was violating their contract, which led to unfair labor practices. I was worried for him, but his union demonstrated persistence and determination. They never gave up fighting for my father's and his coworker's rights. Watching how they refused to back down showed me that justice isn't handed to you, you have to fight for it together. This belief became part of who I am. In school during group projects, I make sure that quieter students are heard, just like my father's union made sure every worker had a voice.

The lessons I gained from my father's union are now an important factor for me. I have brought them into my own life by participating in community projects where teamwork is essential, such as fundraising for those families who need the support. During these moments, I felt the same sense of unity as I saw in my father's workplace, many people setting aside their differences and joining together for something bigger than themselves. I have also learned resilience, as even when a plan fails, I no longer see it as a defeat but rather an opportunity to grow and improve. A few weeks ago, my team and I had planned to go door to door inviting the community to donate to those in need; unfortunately, we were not able to reach our goal but decided to have a different approach for our next fundraising event. This perspective of staying positive, learning

from mistakes, and finding courage to try again was shaped by my father's hard work and the valuable moments we shared, moments that were made possible by his union's support.

My family's story is part of a much bigger truth. Unions don't just help one household, they contribute to the uplift of entire communities. In the hotel industry, workers are often immigrants or people of color and unions provide dignity and stability to those who might feel invisible. Witnessing this made me realize the importance of taking action as a community. Fairness and justice can be obtained if people choose to fight for it together, whether it be in a hotel break room or a courtroom.

The values my father's union installed in me influenced my career goals. I want to study engineering because I want to design systems that make workplaces safer and more efficient, whether it means through improved equipment or better building designs. For instance, I would like to design safer kitchens and dining spaces so service workers like my father can focus on their task and not have fear of any unsafe conditions. Just like my father's union fought to protect him, I want to use my knowledge to protect others. For me engineering isn't just about machines or systems, it's about people. Pursuing a higher level of education is not just a personal achievement but it is a way to honor the sacrifices my parents made.

When I think back to my father's words, I now hear them differently. I now understand them as more than just reassurance about bills and paychecks. They were a promise that his union would give us stability, dignity, and small moments of joy, like the car rides home from school that I will always treasure. Those words taught me that families like mine do not have to struggle in silence, and that even when we face

hardships, there is strength in standing together. My father's union gave my family stability, and now I want to use my education to give stability to others.