

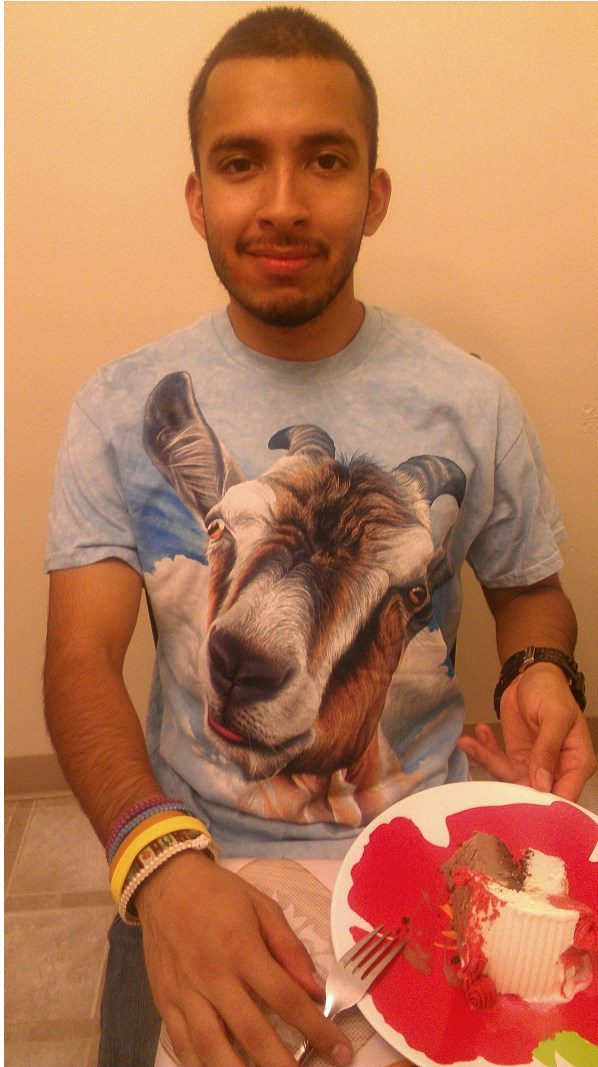
Out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope
-Martin Luther King Jr.

Although the quote is simple, it gives off a powerful message that has impacted me on how to look at the challenges that are sure to come later into my life. This is just one of the meaningful messages that I came across during my second week in DC. The time is 12:37 pm EST and the weather is cloudy with a good chance of low humidity, a plus for the intern group.



This second week for me has been both inspiring and emotionally challenging for the reason that I am beginning to feel homesick with the need to see to my family and enjoy some of my mother's amazing Michoacan styled homemade food. This week, I

would like to you give some background information over my family and what it is that they did to push me to break the limits that each day can have on an individual. Let me start off with my father...my father, Eleazar Rojas Santiago, immigrated into the states when he was only 15 in order to work the strawberries in the farmlands of California. Before he went to the states, he lived in the beautiful tropical state of Veracruz, the Mexican state where the Spanish conquistador Hernan Cortes took control of the Aztec empire. The last time I visited the state was when I was about four years old, but my father's description of the state make me want to visit it once again in order to indulge in some much needed seafood. My father always jokes with me in saying that when I visit Abasolo Del Valle, my father's hometown, he plans to make me *ordeñar las vacas* in order to bulk myself up for the ladies. He's a jokeful person who always loves to make those around him laugh; it's funny because he always refers to me as *chivo* for the reason that whenever we eat as a family, I always tend to pour salt into my food whenever he isn't looking, which apparently means that I am similar to goats in my goatee and love for salt. My father even bought me a goat shirt for my birthday just to show me that I need to lay off the salt. To continue on, he loves listening to cumbia, believes that family comes first, and is one of the hardest working people I have ever known in my life. Going back to his journey, at the age of 15, he worked in a variety of fields such as strawberries, apples, sugar beets, onions, walnuts, etc. He explained to me that the temperatures in California would, at times, rise to an upwards of one hundred and ten degrees. He faced many hardships in his life such as discrimination and he even lived in the streets in a cardboard box for several months. But he never gave up in the struggle; he always gave it his all and after a few years, he decided to move to Oregon in order to find work. After a couple of years in Oregon, he met my mother and decided to wed at the age of about twenty-three. While married, my parents faced even more hardships due to lack of



financial security...there was even one instance where my father caught a break when he won one hundred dollars from a lottery which was used to purchase food for the family.

Throughout the later years, he worked two jobs, one in the fields and other as packager for Simplot, where he would work an excess of about eighteen hours a day. After working this arduously for about eight years, he decided to go into another line of work. He always tells my siblings and I, *lo que hago es por tu bien, no para el mio*. My father's life journey is an amazing story, which shows me that although the world will try to break you, you must never give up and always strive to be the best that you can be. It's just so amazing how successful one can become despite the most extreme hardships that one can come across.

My mother Agripina Cornejo Banderas, is the only women in the world who I will ever call my mother. No other women will ever replace her as my mother for the reason that she too worked herself in an arduous environment to provide my siblings and I with the opportunities that the land of opportunities can bring to a person. Her journey begins in the state of Michoacán in a little ranch called *Zacate Colorado* where she and her family would rent the local fields and fill them with a variety of

produce ranging from corn to tomatoes. She would tell me that her day usually began at 5 in the morning where she would help my grandmother and great grandmother prepare breakfast and wash clothes for my 6 uncles and one aunt. You could say she had a quite a childhood by having six brothers and only one sister. When we were younger, we would ask her what it was that she did for fun around the house...what she told us astonished me quite a bit for the reason that it was pretty dangerous. What she did was stand on a tire that hung on the branch of a tree and used nothing but the weight and momentum of herself to forcefully swing the tire in the air...what made it astonishing was the fact that the tire was about fifteen feet above jagged rocks that could have ended in certain death. However, to continue on my mother's journey, she immigrated to the states when she was about 19 to work the fields in the state of Oregon, she explained to me that the wages were different back then with the minimum pay being about \$3.35. After marrying my father, her life became tougher for the reason that she both worked in the fields and cared for the family after the day's work. She told me that after about a ten-hour shift in the fields, she would arrive home not to rest, but to prepare dinner for my father and older two siblings. It's funny because many people refer to women from Michoacán as cooks; for example, there was a moment when my father invited a friend over for dinner and that friend asked my mother where she was from, she responded in saying *soy de Michoacán*. The friend responded

by saying *De Michoacán? Oh, entonces eres cocinera?* And it's true; nothing in this world can ever beat my mother's cooking. She would prepare a variety of dishes every day such as *caldo de pollo, costillas en chile rojo, enchiladas, garnachas, popusas, carne dorada, caldo de res, tacos de lengua, tortillas hecho a mano* etc. I could literally go on for days over how amazing my mother's food is; I always tell her that if I ever become fortunate enough to gain financial security that I will help fund a restaurant for her in New York City. I love my parents so much for the sacrifices and unforgettable memories that they have given my siblings and me. I am thankful to God every day I pray to him for allowing me to be surrounded with such loving and hardworking people and I know that not many are fortunate enough to live this kind of life; therefore, I never take anything for granted. I am thankful for their discipline and motivation because without them, who knows where I would be in this life. Now that I look back, there was always one thing that my parents would tell me every morning before going to school and that was *que dios te cuide, echale ganas*.

My parents, however, were not the only ones in my life to have pushed me to reach new limits; my two siblings share as much influence as my parents have in my life. My sister, Alejandra Antoñia Rojas is someone who although she is small, she can be fierce. She was the first in the family to go to college and after an arduous six years, she has earned a Summa Cum Laude for her Bachelor's degree while earning a perfect 4.00 for her Master's degree in Criminal Justice. Although I wasn't able to attend her graduation ceremony due to this internship, I still streamed the ceremony online because I promised her I would do so. You cannot imagine how proud I am of my sister despite her endeavors. Upon receiving exceptional scores for her thesis papers, I became so happy for her and I was surprised when she told me "There were times during college where I depended on you because I told myself that if you can do it, then so can I." When I heard this, I became surprised, because I too depended on her in telling myself, "If Ali can do it, then so can I." My sister is the only person in this world, who I will truly call my sister...the reason I say this is for the reason that there are people in this world who consider themselves my brother or sister, but I will never share the same courtesy with them for the reason that they have not been with me through my ups and my downs. Back to my sister, Ali has been a prominent figure in my life because she has been there to support me and offer me advice on issues that I have been dealing with. She always calls me "pooks"; no matter where we're at, if we're at home, at an office, a family gathering, she is not afraid to call me pooks in front of those around her. That is what I respect about her, she's fearless and she is not afraid to be fierce whenever necessary. I would always joke with my mother in saying *quien iba saber que alguien tan chiquita iba tener tanto coraje*. I also respect my sister for the reason that she always pushes me to work hard in my studies and she always offers me support whenever I am struggling. She always welcomes me to visit her in Monmouth (a town about 20 miles from Oregon State) and whenever I do, she spoils me with her hospitality and homemade Michoacán styled food. I want to say thank you Ali, you are a strong fearless women who although you can be fierce, you have such a beautiful way of impacting those around you. You strive to the best you can be and you always try to inspire the younger generation to get ahead in life. Thank you for your support and your love because without you, only God knows where I would be in this life. Never give up in your dreams and remember that God has special plans for your future. And although you may not know this, every time I say goodbye to you, I always feel emptiness in my heart and I always fight the urge to cry in front of you. Te quiero mucho Hermana, Si Se Puede!

And last but not least, I'd like to share with you the story of my brother, Eduardo Rojas Cornejo. Oh man, this kid is a character...let me start with what his reaction was when he first

heard that I was born in 1994. When my parents brought me home for the first time, they showed me to him and he told my parents *no lo quiero, echalo en la basura*. It's funny because to this day, he continues to make that reference to me. He is one of the few people in this world who I can truly be myself around without the fear of ever being judged. He is currently attending Western Oregon University where he plans to major in Psychology with a minor in business. I am also proud of my brother because he pushes himself to become involved within the school. For example, he is the main reason why I joined a fraternity this year...he was a founder of an ΩΔΦ colony at Western Oregon University, a multicultural Fraternity that believes in grades first and then serving the community. With his strong determination to make history within the university, I decided to join the same fraternity this past term. What I respected from him was the fact that he never pushed me to join the fraternity, because he doesn't want me to follow in his footsteps, better yet, he wants me to do what I feel comfortable with and to be my own man. I'd like to share an amazing story about my brother with you that not many have heard about. When my brother was about 2 or 3 years old, he was riding a tricycle in front of my uncle's house during a family get together. Everything was going good until a police cruiser was driving an upwards of about 75 miles per hour down the road my brother was on. What no one anticipated was the fact that the police cruiser would hit my brother causing critical life threatening injuries to him. It's truly inspiring to me how, despite being young, my brother was able to overcome one of the strongest adversities he could have ever faced in his life. Despite his hardships, he always finds time to talk and hang out with me through walks we take around town and our recent 10-mile plus bike rides. He always tends to have a good taste in music such as Biggie Smalls, Tupac, J Cole, Kendrick Lamar etc. He always tends to spoil me with food and videogames while asking for nothing in return. We've shared many memories with one another and I am proud to call him my big brother. I want to say thank you Eddie, I could not have asked God for a greater brother. Thank you so much for your support, your love, and your advice that has helped me very much throughout these years. Thank you for helping me in my times of need bro and thank you for the all-nighters we pulled to go out to eat at Shari's, Denny's, and Mcdonald's. Keep up the hard work; I know you can do it...Si Se Puede!

As you can see, my family has been the driving force towards my success; I always thank God each night for giving me such a family. We must always remember that each day is a gift and the following day is never certain to come; therefore, we must always get out of our comfort zone and have no regrets in life. Behind everything I have spoken to you about, God is truly the one I love the most because it was decision that I would live this life and the opportunities that not many are fortunate enough to come across. Since I've spoken in deep depth over my family, I will be brief over what I did this week. Work at the internship was quite slow; therefore not much happened during the week except for the usual workload that is expected from the job. My highlights of the week occurred when we visited the Smithsonian zoo, Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial, and when I told my family what grades I earned this past term. The Smithsonian zoo was quite extraordinary due to the potpourri of exotic animals ranging from poisonous frogs to Asian elephants. The intern group stayed at the zoo for around five hours, but there was so much to see that the time just flew right by. A memorable moment occurred when Chive, Elizabeth, and I went to watch seals that were being cared for by the zoo workers for the reason that they knew a variety of tricks such as rolling, jumping out of the water and fin movements. However, the most memorable moment occurred a little after visiting the Martin Luther King Jr. memorial because there was a screening of a documentary over Jose Antonio Vargas, an acclaimed undocumented journalist who came out to the public about his immigration status. His story was

incredible but the moment that got to me occurred when Jose Skyped his mother after not speaking to her for around twenty years. My eyes began to fill with tears at this moment because his mother reminded me very much of my own mother in her reaction to seeing him. I could not imagine the type of he was going through at that time, but this one moment taught me to never take my family for granted and to fight for those who have not had the ease of mind that I have had. Luckily, through the will of God, I was able to earn straight A's for my spring term and the joy in my family's voices made the struggle worth it because this goes to show that success goes to those who are willing to work for it. Never in my dreams did I expect to maintain a 3.97 GPA for my first year of college whilst in the Engineering program. I want to thank CAMP for this opportunity that they have provided me with; my family for pushing me to break unimaginable limits; and last not but not least to God for giving me this life and for giving all of us the gift of life each and every day. SI SE PUEDE!