

On March 10, 2011, the Illinois Youth Justice League held its second annual *National Coming Out of the Shadows Day: Undocumented, Unafraid, Unapologetic* in order to challenge the “unjust immigration system that continues to criminalize us.” The rally was held at 3:00 p.m. at Daley Plaza. Ten undocumented youth told their stories of living in the U.S. undocumented, and becoming unafraid and unapologetic. Below are just two of the stories that were shared. The Provincial Council of the Clerics of St. Viator offered financial and moral support of this event.

My name is Jorge and I’m undocumented.

I came to the U.S. when I was 8 years old. Raised by a single mother, who cleaned offices at night so that she would be around to ensure that her children received a good education. Learning English through Goosebumps books, I sat with other classmates, whose skin was darker but accents were just as thick. As a youngster, I played with Pokémon trading cards and was obsessed with McDonald’s.

I am now 23. It’s been 16 years.

A year ago today, one of my friends, came out and said, “I will come out of the shadows everyday if I have to. I am a human being, I deserve to be happy.” I think I am finally at that place. I’m ready to speak for myself when I say that I’m not apologetic for the fact that I am living in the U.S.

Time after time, I’m constantly reminded that I cannot attain a license to drive my mother to the grocery store. And time after time I’m reminded that my accent is from Chicago. Everything, I have learned reminds me of this city.

This May, I will walk across the stage to receive my university diploma. As much as I want to say that I am excited, I’m not. I am scared. Scared that my bachelor’s degree will be nothing but a piece of a paper. Scared that I studied and sacrificed for nothing.

I now find myself in the same place from when I was a senior in high school. Struggling to find my place in this country, but one thing has changed; I am ready to take control and piece my identity together. This shattered, immigration system has held me back long enough.

I know that I am “American” in every sense of the word, and no one can take that away from me. It is time that we all break free and come out! As Harvey Milk once said, “Come out to your friends...if indeed they are your friends... but once and for all, break down the myths, destroy the lies and distortions. For your sake. For their sake.”

I know you feel like giving up, but I won’t let you. High school kids should not be weeping because college dreams are crushed. When 65,000 DREAMs are denied a year, there is something wrong.

Being undocumented feels like you are young forever. And there is no list for me to sign my name at the bottom. So that I can grow up. I speak English just as well as you do and I understand that you’re afraid of change. But I am not leaving.



Carla, coming out of the shadows.

As a helpless five year-old, clutching the hands of my mother and father, I never dreamt of living a life entrenched in fear and shame. Neither did my parents when they uprooted my sisters and me from our quiet life in the Philippines to come to America—the land of plenty, the land of freedom. But for the greater part of the 17 years I’ve lived in this country that I call home, I have been afraid.

When I was 11 years old, a distant relative threatened to report my family to Immigration Services because we overstayed our visas and were now out of status. The thought of deportation prompted my family to flee our home and leave behind everything—my parents’ jobs, my school, our friends—with little hope of ever coming back. We spent over a month and a half in hiding until we felt safe enough to return. From then on, my

parents told me never to tell anyone about our status.

I grew up feeling lesser than others, but my undocumented status only pushed me to work 10 times harder to prove that I matter and deserve the life my parents sacrificed to give me. I did and continue to do what I think is right to make my parents proud and to persevere through all the obstacles in my education. And thus far, I have no regrets.

But that’s not to say I fully accept my situation. No, I still cry. I still cry for the dreams suspended in limbo as I reach with all my might yet remain constrained and stuck in place. I still cry because I feel like an anomaly in my own community.

In the Asian American community, we don’t openly talk about being undocumented in fear of bringing shame to our families and ourselves. But refusing to address a problem that plagues us, too, doesn’t make it go away.

To all the dreamers out there in my community, to all the young people hiding out in your bedrooms wishing with all your heart that something would change, that this country would finally recognize YOU as an American and allow you a chance at a REAL future, all I can say is: you can’t wish for change, nor can you go at it by yourself.

The time is now to emerge from the shadows because you are not alone. Come out of the shadows and take action. Be honest with yourself and those around you. Reclaim your identity and accept yourself, regardless of discrimination and hate. Look at yourself in the mirror, in the eyes, and say, “I am undocumented, but I am not ashamed.”

My name is Carla. I am undocumented. I am unafraid. And I am unapologetic.

For more information, please visit www.iyjl.org.

