

Our Sanctuary Family - Memories From a Family Member

Presented by Erica Rodriguez Hatt, January 18, 2015



My name is Erica Rodriguez Hatt. I'm so happy to be here today, with so many of the people who have meant so much to me and my family. The First Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ann Arbor forever changed our lives.

26 years ago this congregation took a big risk when they decided to provide sanctuary for my family. They were courageous, compassionate, generous, and loving. What they did so many years ago has created so much good.

For my friends and colleagues it's hard to believe that I was once a four-year-old girl who, along with her family, fled a war torn country. They see me now, healthy, successful, and happy and they don't have a clue that my life could have been very different. It's even hard for me to believe that I fled a situation where torture, death, fear, and despair were a reality.

Because of the support of the UU church my childhood memories are not of war. My childhood memories are of living in a beautiful, exciting, loving place. That was what the carriage house was for me. The little house that sat behind the UU church was cozy and warm, an excellent place to grow up. Everyday we played on the adjoining playground, and often explored the halls of the church.

But it wasn't just the carriage house that the church provided for us. Growing up, we were surrounded by people who cared for us like family. We often had visitors from the church, who stopped by to check in on us or bring us clothes or toys. Many members of the sanctuary committee became extremely involved with our family. Some of them took us kids to our medical appointments or school related activities, others invited our family into their homes for holiday dinners. The love and generosity of the sanctuary committee was never-ending.

As you can see, the congregation made sure our basic human needs were met, and they provided us with love and encouragement we needed to truly thrive. Because of them today we live happy and successful lives.

Most of us live here in Ann Arbor. Oscar is a commercial litigation lawyer at Hooper Hathaway, I'm a teacher for Ann Arbor Public Schools. Cristi, the youngest, is studying at Eastern full time and working part time at Whole Foods. My mother is no longer working two jobs, she cleans homes here in Ann arbor. My other sister, Carolina lives in Wisconsin. She is a real estate lawyer.

My family's story shows the power a group of people has to make change. This is not something abstract; it is something that is very real. I hope that one day I can be part of something that will change the lives of others in the same way that your congregation's efforts have changed ours. I think that the love and bravery that the UU church has shown towards my family is contagious, and I know that it is the thing that will make this world a better place.

From the bottom of our hearts we thank the UU church, you will always be our family.

