

HAILEY
ZUMKELLER

You ask 'what does Unionism means to you?' and to me it means protection. Therefore, I will be focusing on a similar question: "How do unions protect your family?" because it isn't about me, it is about them. The following paragraphs focus on how unions have impacted my entire family through their dedication to protecting my father.

Unions protect. This statement relates to an abundance of different areas of my father's life. Unions work to acquire better terms and conditions in the work place, providing better wages, better hours, legal services, over-time pay, annual leave conditions, treatment against discrimination, safe work conditions and they even provide training in order to ensure this.

Unions protect my father against unfairness and frustration. As part of a union, he is given a voice as part of a collective group of likeminded, hardworking people. They are able to connect with management to voice their concerns. This is especially important when it comes to wages and paying workers fairly. In the beginning of 2018, I had the opportunity to visit and photograph the work effort going into the underground John Hart Dam project. I photographed different parts of the project such as the scaffolding, the indescribably large pieces of machinery, and the depth of the tunnels. One thing that caught my eye was the workers, covered in dirt, sweat, water and a strong will to finish the job. These men, including my father, were working harder than any other workers I have ever seen. They should not be paid minimum wage. They also should not be paid an average wage because they deserve much more than that. Men and women working over eight hours a day, for up to seven days a week in order to provide an important service for an entire city deserve much more than an average wage. A union gives these workers a voice in order to fight for what they deserve. They help protect my father against unfair wages, which ultimately impacts the lifestyle my family and I are able to live. Along with negotiating these fair and better wages, Unions also work hard to provide job security.

My father is able to have these incredible career opportunities with a fair wage because unions protect against imported labour. While studying abroad in Spain this semester, I have been learning about the impacts of Globalization. There are literally millions of workers offering low wage work in order to make any kind of money; Therefore, they are taking the jobs of people who have been working certain jobs for their entire lives. Certain companies have lowered their standards of workers in order to import new labourers, but thankfully Unions have protected thousands of workers, including my father from this. Unions appreciate the skills someone like my father has spent countless years developing.

Likewise, health is another vital aspect that comes to mind in terms of protection. Unions protect my father's health in more ways than one. First, they make sure he is safe on the job site. As mentioned earlier, workers are given all the necessary training and equipment to ensure safety of not only themselves, but of the other workers around them. For example, even when I went to take photos of the John Hart Dam project, I had to show up hours earlier to receive safety training and was then given proper equipment for my time there. It wasn't easy looking through a large camera with a hard helmet and gloves on, let me tell you. But this just goes to show the strides unions are willing to take in order to protect those on the job site.

Furthermore, when off the job site, unions provide health insurance to their workers. This health insurance not only covers my father, but my entire family. This has allowed my brother and I to have braces, surgery, doctor appointments, and much more in order to check up on our own health. Another example of this is that during my first two days in Spain, a recent cut on my foot was infected. Just having the Spanish doctor look at it cost over \$500 alone. Knowing that my dad's union covered all of our health emergencies had made the experience a lot more relaxing and did not 'break the bank' of my small 'studying abroad' budget.

I will be forever grateful that my dad is able to work for such a kind and considerate Union. They truly care about their employees and provide better work contracts than most businesses I know. It is incredibly reassuring to know that although my father is doing more dangerous work than most, that the Union looks out for him. They protect his safety on and off the job site, protect him from losing his job, provide training, ensure fairness in wages, hours, over time pay and much, much more. The incredible life my father has provided my family with would just not be the same without Unions to protect him, so thank you.