

# UNCOMMON GOOD

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## Three Brothers Celebrate Their Success



Photo by Rodriguez Family

The Rodriguez Family, minus youngest son, Ozzie.

One of the great joys of our work at Uncommon Good is seeing our families' and students' hard work pay off after years of effort. About a dozen years ago the Rodriguez Family enrolled their three sons, Erick, Aaron and Ozzie in our Connect to College program. Erick was in 8th grade, Aaron was four years younger, and Ozzie was three years behind Aaron. Now each of them is a young man with a wonderful story to tell.

The family's mother, Maria, the sole extrovert in the family, quickly became an outstanding parent leader at Uncommon Good. Usually we tell our family's stories through the words of the mothers, but in this case I wanted to see if I could get the men to talk for themselves. At first, this was a failure. I knew that both Maria and her husband, Gerardo, a custodian, were immigrants from Mexico. I had learned over the years that though Maria had worked in a school and a doctor's office in her home country, she was never able to afford the education to be able to pursue her dream of going into the health profession. But when I asked Gerardo about his experiences in Mexico, and as an immigrant in the United States, he told me that he never discussed these things with anyone, not even his children. "The only person who knows my story," he said, "is my wife." Sensing a world of suffering behind that statement, I respected his boundaries, and turned to his sons instead. I asked each of them if they would consent to an interview, and happily, they agreed.

### The Software Engineer

When the eldest, Erick, entered our program, he was very shy and had trouble carrying on conversations. Being assigned an Uncommon Good mentor helped him to develop his social skills. His first mentor was Jimmy, a retired gentleman who taught him to play golf and enthusiastically talked up college. His second mentor, Seth, was studying to be a teacher and loved to talk, which helped Erick to learn the art of conversation. In one memorable excursion, they went to a university informational fair where Seth met the young woman who is now his wife. Erick and Seth formed a friendship which *[continued on page 5]*

## The Doctor Heals Her Community

*"My all-time favorite remedio (remedy) was the one for ear infections. Roll a sheet of newspaper into a large cone, aim the pointed end at the ear, light the other end with a match, and gently waft the smoke into the ear. This is believed to suck out aire, "bad air," and restore balance to the inner ear, which promotes healing. The part I loved the most, came after the procedure when my grandmother placed my head on her lap and sang softly until I fell asleep. Moments like those made me feel that the practices of our immigrant family were magical. Looking back, she was already teaching me the fundamentals of patient-centered care.*

*Thanks to my grandmother, I was drawn at that young age to wellness and healing. But like many working-poor Latino families, if we did not go to the doctor when we were sick, we certainly did not go when we were well. To stay healthy we avoided walking barefoot on a cold floor, as we believed that would lead to disease entering the body. We never, ever, went to bed with wet hair because we believed that left the tonsils and throat vulnerable to illness.*

*"When our remedios failed, we sometimes ended up at our local emergency room. This was the Los Angeles County -USC Medical Center, known to us locals as El General, after the soap opera, General Hospital. It was not a glamorous place as it was on TV. But very much like the soap opera, the doctors and nurses did not look like us. The staff was always very busy, whizzing by from place to place, taking care of the many patients that presented to the ER. We were often sent home not really understanding what had transpired or what to expect. It was not that we were ungrateful for the care we got, but only that we wished someone would just stop and explain things to us. I remember thinking that there had to be a better way of taking care of people, and it is these thoughts that seeded my desire to pursue medicine."*

Dr. Karla Gonzalez comes from a line of strong and resilient women. Her Grandma Elia, whom Karla described in her anecdote at the beginning of this article, was a child bride at 14 in Mexico. She fled from her abusive husband to the United States with her children after a relative told her that "a woman could make it up here." Sure enough, she supported her children by working a variety of menial labor jobs, such as packing carrots, making car seat covers in a factory, washing dishes, being a janitor and working in cafeteria lines.

Karla's mother, Ana, was a child of eight when the little family arrived in this country. She was sent to a school where it was not ok to speak Spanish and she bonded with the only other immigrant child there, a girl who spoke *[continued on page 4]*



Dr. Karla Gonzalez with her beloved grandma, Elia.

Photo by Gonzalez Family

# Thank You, Friends!

Uncommon Good offers its most grateful thanks to the following foundations, businesses and organizations which have made generous grants in 2019 to support its education, medical and urban farming programs that serve 1,030 low-income students and families each year and that support 65 doctors, dentists, pharmacists and optometrists who serve 172,076 low-income patients each year:

Beach Point Capital ■ California Community Foundation ■ California Wellness Foundation ■ Children's Fund ■ Claremont Presbyterian Church ■ DecisionQuest ■ Draper Family Foundation ■ Economy Shop ■ Edison International ■ Educational Attainment Services ■ Edward A and Ai O Shay Foundation ■ Fay Family Charitable Fund ■ General Motors ■ Inland Empire United Way ■ Kaiser Foundation Hospitals, Ontario ■ LA Care Health Plan ■ Manatt, Phelps & Phillips ■ Mose J and Sylvia Dilman Firestone Trust ■ MUFG Union Bank Foundation ■ Oportun ■ QueensCare ■ Ralph M Parsons Foundation ■ Robert C. Fraser Fund of the California Community Foundation ■ Rose Hills Foundation ■ Rosemont Mortgage ■ Samech Aleph Lamed Inc ■ S Mark Taper Foundation ■ The California Wellness Foundation ■ The Rose Hills Foundation ■ University Club of Claremont ■ TRUECar ■ US Bank Foundation ■ USDA ■ Weingart Foundation ■ Winston & Strawn



Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles (WLALA) President, Jennifer Leland, presents the Distinguished Service Award to Uncommon Good Executive Director, Nancy Mintie, at the WLALA Centennial Celebration, in honor of Mintie's lifetime of public service.



Uncommon Good student, Denny Duran Flores, who performed at the 131st Pasadena Tournament of Roses Parade. He was one of an elite group of Southern California student musicians who was chosen for the Tournament of Roses Honor Band. Previously, his older brother performed with the Band. We are so proud of them both!

WLALA

Photo by Duran Flores Family

## What Do We Do?

1. Connect to College/CAUSA: Over 1,000 low-income students and their parents are served through CCC. Starting in the 4th grade, students are given one-to-one mentoring, tutoring, educational enrichment, leadership training, community service opportunities, and extensive help preparing for and applying to college. Parents are provided with social services, educational opportunities, and leadership training. 100% of Uncommon Good students go to college, even as 41.5% of their socio-economic peers are dropping out of high school. The CAUSA component of the program is an urban farm enterprise that produces organically grown fruits and vegetables for CCC families and the community at large.

2. Medicine for the Economically Disadvantaged: This program helps idealistic doctors, dentists, pharmacists and optometrists repay their sky-high educational loans, some nearly \$800,000, so they can accept the lowest paying jobs in the medical profession, those serving the poor in community clinics throughout the southland. MED also has a health career pipeline through which Uncommon Good students are introduced to careers in medicine and helped to prepare for medical school.

3. Whole Earth Building (WEB): This is Uncommon Good's office, a beautiful first-of-its-kind green building that was constructed by hand using little more than on-site earth, by Uncommon Good staff, children, parents, and hundreds of community members. It continues to receive visitors from every continent (except Antarctica!) who come to learn how to create buildings that keep people safe from natural disasters and do not harm the earth.

Photo by Reyna Abraham



Children and their teacher create a scarecrow for the Uncommon Good farm plot at Temple Beth Israel.



Uncommon Good student Nicole promotes our delicious figs.

Photo by Reyna Abraham

# Fun on the Farm

Uncommon Good's organic farming program has been busy producing delicious healthy organic food and sponsoring educational events for our students, families and community.

Photo by Johanna Larios



Uncommon Good parent leader, Maria Rodriguez, created a Day of the Dead altar as part of an indigenous cooking class she gave for the students of Scripps College Professor Martin Vega.



Uncommon Good families make grapefruit peel bird feeders during their field trip to the California Citrus Heritage State Park.

Photo by Johanna Larios

Photo by Ty Teissere



Uncommon Good participated in Sustainable Claremont's showing of the film "Biggest Little Farm."



Uncommon Good families receive fruit tree seedlings from Green Friends, the environmental organization of Mata Amritanandamayi, the "Hugging Saint" of India.

Photo by Nancy Mintie

## The Doctor Heals Her Community *(con't. from page 1)*



Photo by Gonzalez Family

Dr. Gonzalez with her mother and daughter.

only Cantonese. “Somehow we communicated,” Ana told her daughter. The family settled in the East Los Angeles neighborhood of Boyle Heights, which was undergoing a transition from a well-to-do Jewish community into a “Little Mexico” in one of those demographic transformations so common amidst the ever churning stew of populations that make up Los Angeles County. As a teen, Karla’s mother Ana worked in some of the Jewish owned shops which still lined the main street, Brooklyn Avenue, before it was rechristened Cesar Chavez Avenue. It was while she attended Roosevelt High School in East Los Angeles that Ana met Karla’s father. However, as soon as he learned that Karla had been conceived, he abandoned Ana. Ironically, years later, after Karla herself had become a physician, she learned that this father whom she had never known had returned to Mexico and eventually had become a doctor there. Karla’s mother’s dreams of becoming a pharmacist, however, were not to come true. She had to go to work to support herself and Baby Karla. She worked extremely hard and ultimately made enough money to buy the Boyle Heights home where she, Grandma Elia, Karla, and now Karla’s daughter, still live together, four generations of resourceful and determined women.

Inspired by her grandma and mother, Karla also worked hard, graduated from college, and became a special education teacher at her alma mater, Roosevelt High School. But she was disturbed to see how sick her students were, with obesity and diabetes, even though they were supposed to be too young to be at risk for diabetes. She began to think that perhaps her calling was to do something to improve the health of her community. So she decided to go back to school and registered at East Los Angeles Community College, intending to explore becoming a doctor, but because she knew so little about the process, she accidentally enrolled in the nursing program. However, on the first day of class, a young Chicano student, Yasser Giron, came in and offered tutoring services. When he learned that Karla wanted to be a doctor, he told her that he did, too. He had more guidance available to him about the pathway to medical school and he walked her through all of the necessary steps. Ultimately, she graduated from The David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA with both an MD and a Master’s Degree. Now she, in turn, is mentoring other low-income young people who are interested in exploring careers in health.

However, this success did not come without hundreds of thousands of dollars in educational debt and high anxiety on the part of Karla and her mother about how she would repay such unimaginable sums. This is especially true now that Karla is taking on the responsibility of supporting her aged grandma and helping her mother financially, while raising her own daughter. Fortunately, she connected with Uncommon Good and through the LA Care Elevating the Safety Net Physician Loan Repayment Program, she has received help to repay her school loans, freeing her to work as a family doctor at the outpatient clinic of El General, the hospital of her childhood. She walks to work, a short distance from her childhood home. Fluent in Spanish, Karla is able to communicate with her large Latinx patient population from the standpoint of their shared language and culture. When I asked her to share some examples of patients who had had a great impact on her, she told me these stories:

“The first patient that stands out is a young woman who had been struggling with overwhelming challenges including homelessness, domestic violence, drug use, anxiety and a mood disorder. At our very first meeting, my clinic was running late, the complex patients I had seen just before her had really taken a toll on me emotionally, and frankly I was drained. I read her brief history before she walked in the room. I decided that today was



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Dr. Karla Gonzalez, with a patient, also named Karla, whom she has inspired to return to school.

the day I was going to have absolutely no agenda. She walked in the room, I greeted her and she flashed me a warm smile even though there were tears in her eyes. I told her that there are many things that I typically talk about in a physical, but that today I just wanted to know what she felt I could help her with. She proceeded to tell me a brief story of her life, a story that broke my heart. At the end of the story, she said she just wanted to take it one day at a time and if there was anything I could give her to help her stay sober. We discussed options, and I gave her the same talk I give to every patient in this situation. “You never have to worry about disappointing me. If things get hard, and if you happen to use again, then you come right back, tell me what happened and we will say, “Welcome back. We will never judge you.” In the next few visits, I realized how therapeutic that had been for me. The saying goes, “physician heal thyself.” On this day, this saying took a new meaning for me. In straying from the confines of the typical medical agenda, we both uncovered a great deal of healing.

“My other memorable story comes from a lovely older couple from El Salvador. The wife was my patient first. My team of Community Health Workers, Social Workers and Medical Case Managers, assisted with getting her expensive medications covered and delivered to her home. For this she was grateful, and soon she brought her husband to see me, too. Her husband had many more medical issues and very quickly we discovered he had a serious illness that was life threatening. His pain was overwhelming at times. His wife became his caretaker. Slowly I could see that she was growing tired. I made an appointment to see her alone, without him, during which she cried and confessed how afraid she was to lose her husband of so many years. She never wanted to cry in front of him. She felt like she had to be strong for him. As she was leaving she thanked me for letting her cry and said “thank you for not trying to give me medication for this. I just needed to cry.” Some people have said that these patients would be best served by a therapist and in many cases I believe this to be absolutely true. Even still, our role as physicians is fluid and dynamic, and sometimes just requires a good old fashioned shoulder to cry on.

“Not every patient encounter is positive. On one occasion, I could hear a patient yelling out in the hallway. It was my patient. She had grown tired and hungry from waiting for so long. She was upset and she let me know it. She was homeless, struggling with abuse, drug use and a mental health illness. She cursed at me and my medical assistant, and accused me of being unfair to her because of her race. When those words came out of her mouth, it was like they pierced my heart. Everything that I had ever been fighting for all my life, including racial equality was suddenly in question. My heart was racing but I felt like I needed to set some boundaries. I quietly but firmly asked the patient to leave the office. Inside I was crushed and angry. By the next day, I was ready to put aside my emotions and put the patient first so I called her to debrief, let her know we had every intention of giving her the best care, and said I was looking forward to seeing her in clinic. I was shocked when she came back to see me, and apologized for her behavior and her words. We moved forward from that day, now long behind us. Caring for her has not been easy. It has been frustrating. At the end of each visit, we always part by saying a respectful goodbye and I then I joke and tell her, “Even if you get mad at me, please come back! Don’t make me get on the phone and call you.” Then we laugh. Laughter is sometimes the best medicine.”

I’m not usually one to contradict medical advice, but I do have to disagree with the good Dr. Karla. For there is one medicine even better than laughter. It’s love, of course, the exquisite love that Karla pours out each day to heal her suffering community.

## Three Brothers Celebrate Their Success

(con't. from page 1)

has endured, with Seth sharing the news a few months ago that he and his wife had just welcomed a baby boy into their family.

Erick recalls the most fun thing about his time with Uncommon Good was participating in our youth environmental leadership group, Teen Green:

“I learned how to grow my own food, where it comes from, and the impact on my health. I’m still using what I learned there today. I continue to learn how to use as many vegetables as I can.”

Uncommon Good also helped Erick aspire to and successfully apply to college. When he first entered our program as an eighth grader he was planning to skip college and become a mechanic. Though his parents did not know how to help him get to college, they told him that they did not consider mechanics a career track and that was not what they had worked so hard for. Ultimately, with the help of Uncommon Good and mentor Seth, Erick was accepted to the University of California campus at Santa Cruz. He found that he loved the school with its proximity to forests and the beach. He joined the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, learned and eventually taught salsa dancing, and made friends for life.

But there were significant challenges as well. I asked him if he felt pressure as the first in his family to go to college.

“Yes, I felt a lot of pressure, because I was trying so hard to set a good example for my brothers. I wish I had known that it would have worked better if I hadn’t put so much pressure on myself and did not see every little thing as a deal breaker. I even came home at one point when my grades had slipped and we had a family meeting about it. I encouraged my brothers to step up their game and study hard so that they would have the skills to conquer college when they got there.”

In addition to the academic pressure, Erick had to work for money while in college to help cover his expenses. At one point he was working two jobs while taking a full load of classes. While difficult, this turned out to be a blessing since one of his jobs was in the university’s information technology department where they were so impressed with Erick that they hired him when he graduated. He now is a Computer Resource Specialist II for his edenic UC Santa Cruz alma mater.

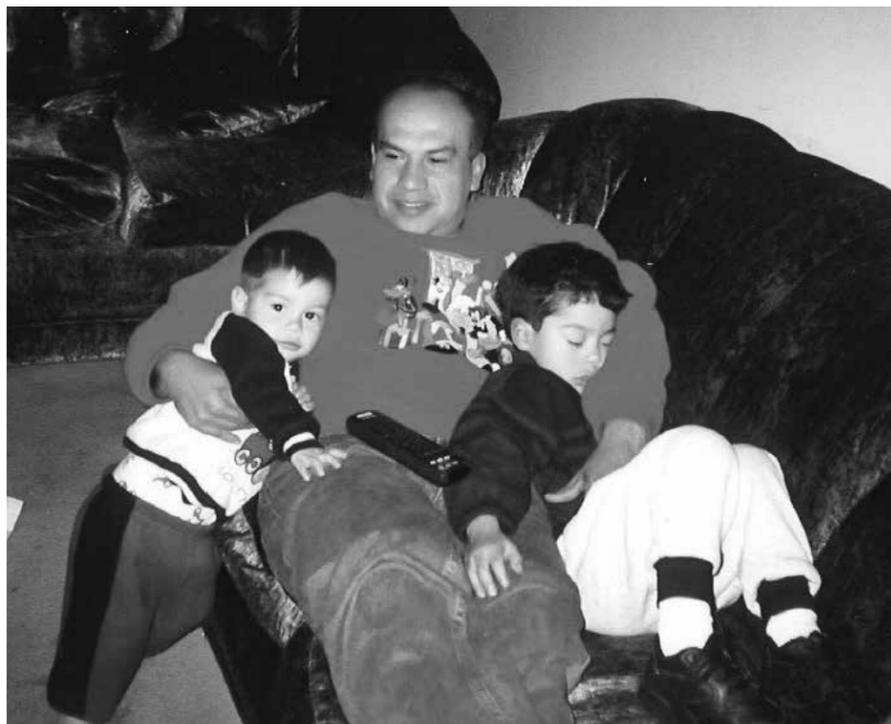
### The Medical Researcher

Like his older brother Erick, brother number two, Aaron, was shy as a child.

“And when I was very young I would cry over everything,” he confessed.

Like I would cry to make my mom give me a tamale. It was a good strategy because it always worked!”

Because of his social anxiety, the young Aaron tended to stay home and do nothing. That changed when he was enrolled in Uncommon Good’s Connect to College program and given a mentor, Lucas. Aaron didn’t know that it was ok to set foot on college campuses until Lucas took him to the Claremont Colleges, where he was a student.



Gerardo Rodriguez in a rare moment of relaxation with his sons, Aaron and Erick.



Erick Rodriguez with his Uncommon Good mentor, Seth.

“He took me to places that to most people would seem ordinary, but for me was a whole new world: a library, dorms. We also kept trying to get into the huge bell tower on campus but the door was always locked. Then, on the last day before Lucas graduated, the door was magically open and we climbed all the way up to the top and there were people up there who gave us cupcakes!”

When Lucas graduated and went away to medical school, Aaron was devastated, because his older brother also was going away at that time to college. But before he left, Lucas hand picked a new mentor for Aaron, another student named Ian. “He became my big brother replacement,” Aaron recalls.

When it came time for Aaron to apply to college, he was offered a full scholarship to Whitman College in the state of Washington. Whitman is an elite small liberal arts college. Before classes started, Aaron attended the school’s summer program for first generation students. The participants were mostly people of color, so he was shocked when school began and he discovered that the student body was 90% white and well-to-do, and that he was the only Latinx male in his entire class. The faculty also was overwhelmingly Caucasian. Having grown up in a heavily Latinx low-income community, he had some adjustments to make. “Mostly it was that people just didn’t notice what they were saying or doing,” he explained. For instance, once he and a friend were joking around, and his friend’s white girlfriend broke in and said, “I’m going to report you to ICE!” She was trying to be funny, but Trump had just been elected president, and the Latinx community was in a state of terror, feeling that open warfare had been declared on them and their families. As a result, the young woman’s remark cut deeply.

“A lot of the discomfort was income related,” Aaron told us. “For example, I played football my first year there. The other players didn’t like the dorm food and so they would go out to eat after practice. I would stay behind because I couldn’t afford to go out and no one would notice. I got excluded from a lot of socializing like that because of lack of income. No one offered to share so that I could join in.”

On the positive side, Whitman offered an excellent education and the opportunity to have a fully funded study abroad experience. Aaron had started college intending to be a pre-med major. So he jumped at the chance to go on a semester abroad trip to work in the medical system in Chile. But what he found there was disillusioning. The healthcare system was underfunded and riddled with corruption, effectively excluding many of the poor. Aaron learned that the president of Chile is a businessman who is using the high office for his own gain rather than for the betterment of his countrymen. While there were people working to improve the nation’s floundering healthcare system, they were swimming upstream. For instance, some health professionals were trying to combine the best of the country’s traditional medicine with the best of modern medicine. But this was not working very well because the urban Chileans considered the indigenous people to be terrorists and there was a lot of violence committed against them. So few people were open to hearing about traditional medicine, even though it often attempted to treat the root cause of the disease whereas modern medicine, Aaron felt, often seemed to content itself with merely

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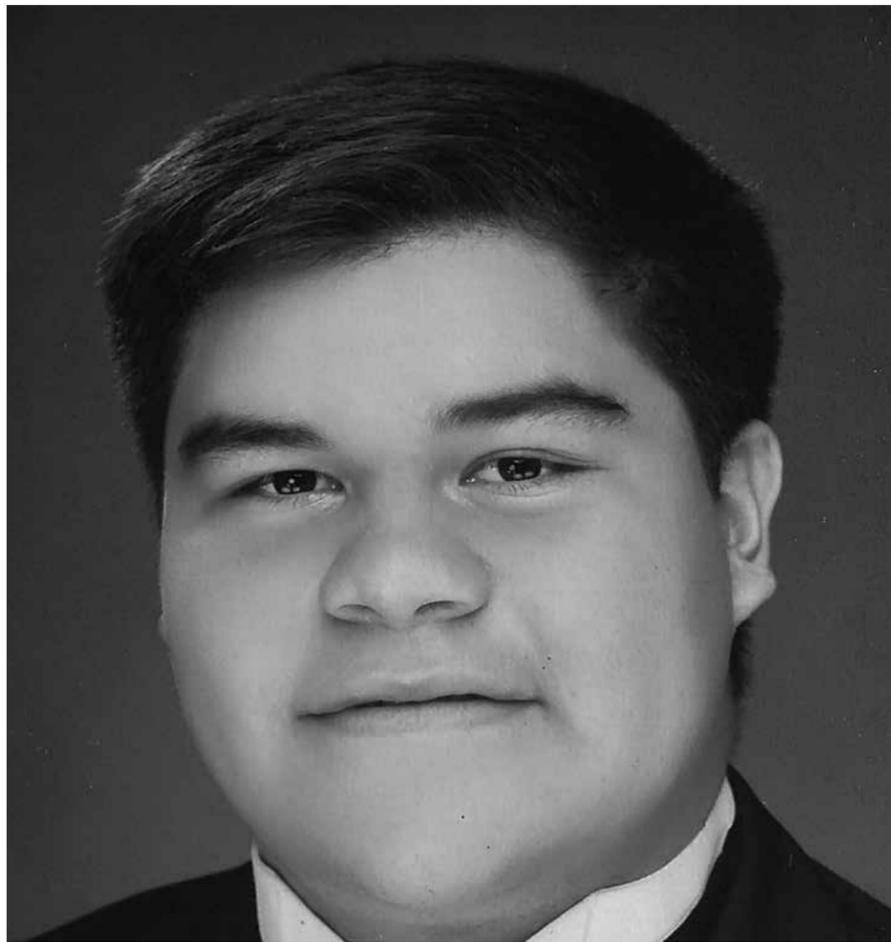


Photo by Rodriguez Family

Aaron Rodriguez

treating the symptoms of illness.

When Aaron returned to the United States, he spent one summer traveling on a bus for an hour and a half each way to get to a medical internship at White Memorial Hospital in East Los Angeles. But that experience troubled him, too.

“The doctors had to spend a lot of time just typing forms on their computers instead of talking to their patients. They would prescribe Metformin for diabetes but didn’t have the time to explain to the patients about changes in their diet and exercise that could really lessen the impact of their disease. I also know that fear keeps a lot of people from seeking medical care here, fear of deportation, and that there are a lot of other problems with access to care. I started to have concerns about being a doctor in a medical system that I found so problematic.”

Meanwhile, back at Whitman, Aaron connected with Professor Michael Coronado, one of only two people of color in the biology department. “He was the first Latino I ever met who was in STEM,” Aaron remarked. Like Aaron, the professor was from a Mexican immigrant family from Southern California. “He knew my name and knew who I was before I even went in to talk to him,” Aaron marveled. Professor Coronado invited Aaron to work in his lab with him and Aaron had the opportunity to contribute to some ground-breaking research on Parkinson’s Disease. While just an undergraduate he presented these findings at three professional conferences. In the course of this work, Aaron found his true calling.

“I want to do research on the causes and cures of diseases. I’d like to do that as a professor where I could be a role model for Latinx students.”

Like his brother Erick, Aaron was hired by his alma mater to be a Lab Technician for Professor Coronado. Currently he is weighing his options in the field of medical research and planning for graduate school to obtain a PhD.

### The College Student

Youngest brother Oswaldo (Ozzie) is following in his brother Aaron’s footsteps as a full scholarship Whitman College freshman. His transition to the school has been eased by having his older brother there to mentor him. Aaron advised him on what warm clothes he’d need, prepared him for the experience of being one of the few Latinx men on campus, and helped him with all the myriad details of settling in to college life. And he’s loving it.

“The other students are very respectful, very intelligent. I’ve never been exposed to such smart people! We are here because we set out to be here. In high school no one wanted to be there. If there was a discussion class, there’d be five minutes of silence before anyone said anything. Here, the

discussion starts right away and continues to the end of class. It’s a relief to be around such people!”

But even though Ozzie’s transition to college has been easier than that of his brothers, he had the most difficult time when he was younger. He had problems with his legs, back and eyes. He had no arch in his feet, which caused back pain. He had four surgeries to try to improve the problem. It got a little better, but lately the back pain has returned. In 4th grade he was diagnosed as legally blind, having lost nearly all of the vision in one eye. He was transferred to an adult doctor who, after a five minute exam, announced that he was going to go blind in the affected eye. But his mother refused to accept this pronouncement. She insisted that Ozzie continue to wear a patch on the good eye to force the diseased one to function. She also got into cooking healthy vegetables for her family from Uncommon Good’s farm program.

“That was hard because I wanted chips all the time. But I got used to it pretty quickly.”

Thanks to his mother’s efforts, in a year’s time, Ozzie’s vision had recovered to 20/30.

### Dad and Mom

At the end of each interview, I asked each of the sons what they were most grateful to their parents for. Here’s what they said:

Erick: “For my dad, there’s a lot. For always being a guide and not forcing me to do anything that I wasn’t comfortable with. A lot of the time when I was growing up, I was really stubborn and wouldn’t listen to his advice. Now I listen. For my mom, her being able to see the good side of every problem, no matter how bad it is. When faced with something difficult, her reaction is almost always positive and she shows us the way out.”

Aaron: “Dad was always very supportive in whatever I wanted to do and he would ask questions to figure out more, to try to understand me so he could support me. And Mom, I would talk to her when I got stressed out and she put me at ease and let me feel that everything would be ok.”

Ozzie: “I’m grateful to my dad for providing, for showing what hard work actually is. Dad works many jobs. When I was in high school he would leave at 5am for his first job, came home when I was at school, sleep, go to work at 2pm for his second job and then get home at 11pm. I never saw him except on Saturday. So I started to stay up really late so I could have some contact with him. One of his custodian jobs was at Temple Beth Israel in Pomona. Sometimes I would go help him with cleaning. I would wax the floor with my aching back and legs. He knew I was hurting and he’d say, ‘That’s why I want you to study so you don’t have a job like this.’ For my mom, I’m grateful she got me involved with Uncommon Good and spent so much time driving me around so I could pursue my music in high school. She would get me to jazz band practice at 6:50am, pick me up from band practice at 8pm, and take me to weekend competitions, getting back at midnight. I’d like to use my college education to be successful so that I can help my parents if they ever need it, like they’ve helped me.”



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Ozzie Rodriguez with his mother, Maria, weighing his suitcase on the Uncommon Good produce scale, to see if it meets airline weight limits as he prepares to go off to Whitman College.

# Books That Change Lives



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Uncommon Good Parent Book Club participant, Maria, with her favorite book, *The Four Agreements*.

“I think of my life in two stages,” Maria said, “the time before I read this book and the time after I read this book.”

Thousands of years ago the historical Buddha made spiritual history by identifying the undisciplined and ignorant mind as the source of much, if not all, of human suffering. In modern times, cognitive behavioral therapists have given their patients the tools to combat their suffering by teaching them how to take control of, and to change, damaging thoughts and emotions. That’s great, except for the fact that CBT therapy costs hundreds, and even thousands, of dollars, money that the poor do not have.

Which brings us to Uncommon Good’s Parent Book Club, a venerable institution

that was started by our Education Programs Director, Carlos Carrillo, many years ago. The idea was to get parents reading so that they could model and encourage reading for their children.

Two years ago the Book Club selection was *The Four Agreements*, which could be described as a brilliant summary of some of the main techniques of CBT. Written in Spanish by the surgeon and author Don Miguel Ruiz, it seemed a natural choice for our club.

“Before I read this book, I was living unconsciously,” our Book Club parent, Maria, told me. “There was too much conflict in my life, I was getting hurt, and I didn’t realize the effect that my words had on others.”

The book gives simple to follow instructions for such things as learning to:

1. Stop internal negative and demeaning thoughts about oneself
2. Stop taking other people’s words and actions personally and realize that these only reflect their view of the world, and not yours
3. Stop making assumptions about what other people think about you or their motives
4. Let go of judgment and learn to forgive yourself and others

“When I started doing these things, I learned that I didn’t have to continue to suffer,” Maria told me. As an example, she said that when her beloved mother was dying in Mexico, Maria was filled not just with a natural grief, but also with rage against her siblings who lived in the same city as their mother, but who Maria thought did not visit much or help their mother financially. Maria’s children were becoming affected by her out-of-control emotions, and suffering from depression and stress.

“But then I put into practice what I had learned from the book,” she explained. “I stopped assuming that I knew why my siblings were acting the way they were. I let go of judging them and forgave them. I started to call them frequently, and as a result, we now have a much better relationship.”

Thrilled with her newfound skills to create harmony in her life, Maria is anxious to pass along this wisdom to her children. “I had to wait until I was 50 to learn these things. I don’t want my children to suffer for as long as I did when it is so unnecessary,” she says.

It is so heartening to know that the Book Club not only has allowed our Uncommon Good parents to pass on a love of reading to their children, but even more significantly, to pass on profound life lessons.

# Holiday Blessings



Photo by Pinkel Family

Sheila Pinkel, the organizer of the clothing drive for families living out in the elements at the border, with some of the donated items.

This past holiday season saw a great outpouring of generosity from you, our friends. Members of Our Lady of the Assumption Catholic Church and Claremont Presbyterian Church, as well as members of the community, participated in our Adopt-a-Family program, bringing holiday cheer to families that were struggling financially. Many more of you donated a small mountain of clothing and blankets for the thousands of asylum seeking families stranded at the border exposed to the elements. Special thanks to Sheila Pinkel for organizing that effort and delivering those donations to the families in need. We also deeply appreciate those of you who contributed to Uncommon Good’s annual appeal. You are the people who make the magic happen here!



Photo by Cris Lin Cobos

Family who benefited from Uncommon Good’s holiday Adopt-a-Family drive.

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