

Q & A: Walsh on Yves Gomes

Michael Sean Winters | Aug. 18, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

All the week at Q & A, we are asking people to name a child of immigrants they admire, and the contribution they make to the nation or to the Church.

We have already looked at Cardinal Gibbons and Sen. Mike Mansfield. Today, Sister Mary Ann Walsh, director of media relations at the USCCB, discusses a young man who recently spoke at her parish, Yves Gomes.

Sister Mary Ann: I admire Yves Gomes, a young man who spoke in our parish in Silver Spring, Maryland, August 8. Yves is 17 and came to America with his parents when he was 14 months old.

His parents tried to establish legal residency but couldn't. When they were stopped for a faulty tail light two years ago, deportation proceedings went into high gear. Both parents

had jobs and were taxpayers. His father, a hotel waiter, was deported to his native Bangladesh. His mother, an assistant professor in computer science, was deported in 2009, to her native India. Yves, and his 15-year-old brother, an American citizen, remained here in the only country Yves has ever known. He studied hard, took five Advanced Placement courses in his senior year, and was accepted into several colleges. He graduated with a 3.8 GPA and his AP chemistry teacher said he is one of the smartest students they've ever had in his high school.

Yves, who with his brother lives with his great aunt and uncle, who are naturalized U.S. citizens, spoke at church on Sunday, August 8, five days before his scheduled August 13 deportation to India. On Tuesday, August 10, after parishioners contacted government officials, Yves got a two-year deferment from what would have amounted to exile to a land he doesn't know. One hopes Yves doesn't have to go through this again in two years.

Yves reminds me of the Vietnamese boat people who arrived on our shores in the late seventies. As I read their stories back then I thought, "People who have overcome those obstacles will be a great gift to our nation." I was proven right and have the same feelings about Yves.

Yves would have benefited from the DREAM Act, which was introduced but not passed in Congress, to help youth like him, who came to the USA as children and now know no other country. His younger brother benefited from U.S. law which guarantees citizenship to anyone born here, but which some seek to challenge now, denying birthright citizenship to infants who came into the world on American soil. The immigration system - or lack thereof - is a mess. We need a realistic program that reflects the decency of our citizens, that doesn't rip families apart, that improves the lot of our country, and accepts the fact that millions of undocumented people are contributing to our country by working, paying taxes, and living out the American dream. It's the best thing we could do for our country. We need good waiters, sharp computer science teachers and students who can ace AP chemistry. We need the Gomes family.

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