



Luis Flores: 3L at University of Tulsa College of Law, Tulsa, OK

[By Rebecca Unzicker]

When a young man from an African country was granted political asylum in the United States last week, it was due in large part to the efforts of Luis Flores and Rebekah Guthrie, students at the Tulsa University Boesche Legal Clinic Immigrant Rights Project. The opportunity to work in immigration rights is what motivated Flores to volunteer for the clinic last fall, leading to the securing of asylum for the client from Eritrea who had been persecuted for his religious beliefs. An immigrant himself, Flores, 24, understands the struggles involved in becoming a United States citizen. A third-year law student, Flores said the case was the most significant of his law school experiences.

“The feeling of knowing you made this big of an impact in someone’s life is something that I will never forget,” Flores said.

Having decided to become a lawyer in order to make a difference in people’s lives, Flores will become an immigration attorney after graduation. The project involving the client from Eritrea was sponsored by Boesche Legal Clinic, a clinical program in which Tulsa University law students represent non-citizens in immigration matters. Flores and Guthrie prepared the client for his asylum interview and traveled with him to the interview in Houston. The students spoke to the client through an interpreter because the client did not speak English.

The students represented the man after he had escaped to the U.S., fleeing persecution and imprisonment by his government for refusing to abandon his membership in a religious minority. Caught praying in an underground Bible study in Eritrea, he was interrogated and ordered to recant his faith by that east African country’s military officials. When he refused, the man was bound hand and foot and left outdoors for days, exposed to the desert heat, rain, and cold nights until he escaped and eventually made his way to Tulsa. His torture and detention had lasted for three months. Through a friend who is a student at Tulsa University, the man discovered the Immigrant Rights Project.

“The client had contacted the Legal Clinic at the Tulsa University Law School about possibly helping him on his asylum case,” Flores said.

“Our teacher spoke with the client and gave my partner and me the opportunity to

choose a case and we were very fortunate to be able to work on this case. It was a tremendous learning experience for me to work under an extremely talented attorney, Professor Elizabeth McCormick, and a great partner, Rebekah Guthrie. We were involved in researching our client’s case, gathering expert testimony, and helping him along every step of the asylum application process.”

The students helped the client prepare his testimony describing the persecution he had endured. They drafted an affidavit detailing the client’s experiences of persecution and gathered extensive documentation of conditions in his home country to support his application. In addition, the law students located and worked with a journalist, a human rights scholar, and a historian who provided expert testimony in support of the client’s asylum claim.

Asylum was granted to the man this month by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. This was the first final decision reached in any cases handled by school’s Immigrant Rights Project. Decisions are pending in several cases previously handled by students. A new group of students that enrolled this spring have begun working with new clients who are survivors of persecution, domestic violence or other crimes. In the first two semesters of the clinic’s operation, the clinic has represented more than a dozen clients from Mexico, Guatemala, Venezuela,

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. I enjoy playing sports. Soccer is definitely my favorite. It’s a great way of clearing my head and getting active after hours of studying. When the weather is really nice, I enjoy playing Frisbee golf. I am horrible at real golf, so I figure I’ll play the next best thing.

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. Right now I have *TV ON THE RADIO: RETURN TO COOKIE MOUNTAIN* in my CD player. They have an incredible sound, and I highly recommend the CD.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. I have two. My parents. I know I said it before but I have the utmost respect for their hard work. I believe that I work as hard as I do because of what I saw from them first-hand. I know that without their inspiration I wouldn’t have done half the things that I have been able to accomplish. I think I’m really lucky to say that.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. My favorite TV show is actually a cartoon (don’t hold it against me) on Cartoon Network. It’s called *Harvey Birdman: Attorney at Law*. I think it’s hilarious. You should check it out sometime.



Indonesia, Russia, Honduras, Canada, and Eritrea.

The Immigrant Rights Project's clients include persons seeking asylum in the United States as a result of persecution or a fear of persecution in their home countries, as well as non-citizen survivors of domestic violence seeking lawful immigration status under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA).

With uncles who are attorneys in Mexico, Flores believes the opportunity to get hands on legal experience while making a difference in the community is the biggest benefit of programs such as the Immigrant Rights Project.

"We need more young attorneys to get out, get involved and have their voices heard. With young attorneys getting involved, we can continue to improve our profession," Flores said.

ON THE NET

The Immigrant Rights Project
www.law.utulsa.edu/clinic/immigrant

Human Rights First
www.humanrightsfirst.org/asylum/asylum_01.htm

Harvey Birdman
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvey_Birdman,_Attorney_at_Law