

## Martha Perez, UConn School of Law

By Teresa Cajot

**Martha Perez, a prospective 2012 graduate at the University of Connecticut School of Law, has had her sights set on a career in law since she was a middle-school student. That's when she experienced exactly what a good lawyer can do.**

Perez's father initially came to the US from Mexico to play in a mariachi band. He also worked as a day laborer and saved up enough money to bring Perez and her mother "to Danbury (CT), a town he fell in love with when he played a few gigs there," according to Perez. She was three years old at the time.

Later, when her father sought permanent residency, he ended up losing \$10,000 to a crooked [immigration attorney](#). Perez notes that at that time, immigrants relied heavily on word of mouth. "Essentially my father knew someone who knew someone who knew a good attorney who was cheap and told us that we would have our papers in no time-and then he disappeared."

The Perez family had no choice but to find a new immigration attorney. They ultimately placed their confidence in an attorney from Buffalo, New York, who discovered that the initial "attorney" had filed for political asylum in the family's name. Unfortunately, by the time this was uncovered, Perez and her parents had been placed on deportation lists.

With the assistance of their attorney, the family was eventually able to obtain legal permanent residency status and in 2006, Perez and her parents became US citizens.

Although the process was an uphill battle, Perez expresses no regrets because the experience shaped her goals for the future.

During her college years, Perez studied history and psychology at the University of Connecticut. With plans for law school still in her future, she devoted herself to exploring the legal field and areas of public interest work. She took on employment as

a part-time clerk at the Connecticut Civil Liberties Union and was also involved with a Bridgeport firm that focused primarily on malpractice work.

In an effort to save money, Perez eventually moved back in with her parents and two younger siblings. In 2008 she started working for Adhesive Tapes International and also became involved with the Danbury Alliance. The alliance functioned as a protest group against the implementation of Section 287(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act within the Danbury area. 287(g) grants state and local law enforcement officials the ability to commission and train certain officers to enforce immigration codes. "My work focused on educating the immigrant community through a series of 'know your rights'discussions," said Perez.

In 2009 she joined the University of Connecticut Alumni Association as the coordinator of board relations, and threw herself right back into public service work. She started law school the same year and has worked in a number of public service positions since then. She has been an intern for Greater Hartford Legal Aid, a translator for the Asylum and Human Rights Clinic, a law clerk for Inmates Legal Assistance Program at Schulman & Associates in Hartford, and a mentor for the Connecticut Bar Association's Truancy Prevention Program.

During the summer, Perez worked for the Chandler Group in New Haven, where she was involved with environmental toxic torts. This semester, she is interning with Attorney Peter Goselin, where she will focus on labor and employment law.