

Christopher Wimmer (2003)

I still cannot believe I was paid to do it: to chat with men and women who had the guts to travel overland from deep inside Mexico to the northern edge of the U.S.; to improve my Spanish; to ramble over the back roads of southwestern Michigan in search of labor camps; to learn how to investigate; to draft, file and serve a complaint; to learn about the Fair Labor Standards Act, the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Workers Protection Act, the Freedom of Information Act; to explore the law behind the H-2A temporary labor certification program and the protections extended to those with Limited English Proficiency, and to draft letters to government officials explaining these laws and reminding them of their duties. I will spend tens of thousands of dollars to learn and do less this year than I did this summer.

One family in particular will be forever vivid in my memory. They were threatened with eviction from their home of eight years when the farm for which they had worked went bankrupt. In the course of chasing down the new owners to delay the inevitable and helping the family get into public housing, I learned about the federal Rural Development program, Farm Credit System, and laws and regulations pertaining to admissions into federal public housing. I learned the difference between tenancy at will and tenancy by sufferance and the difference between the department of Housing and Urban Development and the private companies it employs to manage its properties. I learned the family's number by heart and when, in the end, they decided to buy a trailer on an installment plan rather than move into the new, safe, secure public housing I and an attorney had spent the summer securing for them, I learned that our job, as lawyers, is to help others fulfill their desires, not make their choices for them.

I would do it again in a heartbeat.