



## Tomorrow's Leaders Today: Maria Martina García Granados

By Nora Weaver



*JA Mentor Roberto Corona, JA Student Martina Garcia, and JA Mentor Co-Chair Jorge Phillipe*

As Valentine's Day approaches, many of us turn our thoughts to those we love. This story of Martina's love is touching and inspiring: love of family, plants and learning.

One of seven siblings with an abusive father, Martina decided, at age six, that, since God wasn't protecting and providing for her family, that she must be the one to do so. She began doing small jobs to help her family survive. She took her siblings into fields around El Charco del Ingenio, the botanical garden in San Miguel, to forage for wild broccoli and other edibles. In spite of the pressure of caring for her family and the bullying at school for being dressed in rags, this child's thirst for learning allowed her to win prizes in school for writing and academics.

At age 11, Martina got a job at El Charco. She had no formal knowledge of plants, but she studied hard to learn. She excelled in her job, was given greater responsibility and by age 13 was in charge of the garden's living collection: the care, propagation and sale of plants. She learned to love plants as much as she loved her family, and El Charco became her emotional home. She continued to excel in school, writing poetry and essays as a form of therapy, a way to express her feelings about her family's challenges.

When she graduated from high school, Martina was granted a Jóvenes Adelante scholarship package, which provided university funding, a mentor, life-skills training, English tutoring, counseling, a laptop and a supportive network of Jóvenes graduates. With this scholarship, Martina has attained her university degree in environmental horticulture. As always, she excelled in her studies and was sent to month-long seminars in the US in 2006, Cuba in 2009 and China in 2011. Also, in 2011, she was placed in charge of a Cervantino exhibit called "Resonances of Nature."

It is Martina's dream to pursue her master's degree and then help rural communities create sustainable gardens to feed their townspeople.

Martina's mentor, Roberto Corona says, "I am struck by Martina's resilience, courage, tenacity, her love of learning and her desire to share her knowledge. With all she has overcome in her life and with her belief in herself, she has become a role model for others. She's a survivor!" Martina says, "To fall is not to die. I've struggled and survived. There are no bad things, only opportunities to learn."

We are proud to have seven of the 25 scholarships needed for 2017. We invite you to join us with an investment of about \$120 USD a month, \$1,400 per year or \$7,000 for a student's five-year education, about the price of a cup of 'designer' coffee a day. Any amount will help lift these extraordinarily talented young adults.

Jóvenes Adelante grants scholarships to local honor graduates who cannot afford university. Eighty-five percent of Jóvenes students graduate from college, a much higher success rate than Canada, the U.S. or Mexico. Donate or volunteer at [www.JovenesAdelante.org](http://www.JovenesAdelante.org) and/or contact President Robin Loving at 415-112-3413, 925-476-8117, and/or [robin@robinloving.com](mailto:robin@robinloving.com).