

## HERMAN ROQUE - May 2015

### A Tragic Past Leads to a Promising Future Thanks to COSER Program



Five years ago Herman Roque's doctor told him he was going to die. He had been an addict for 20 years, while hiding it from his wife, his children, his boss, and his friends. But after two decades it caught up with him, and he got a blood infection that caused respiratory failure, kidney failure, and paralyzation from the neck down.

At that point, says Herman, he started going through the five stages of grief and stopped at No. 3. "When I got to bargaining," he says, "I began bargaining my tail off. I said, 'If I get out of this, I promise I'll help others to not get in this situation.'"

Although Herman required two tracheostomies and "coded" three times, he didn't die. He spent the next year in the hospital getting therapy, rehabilitation, and started a lifetime of dialysis. (He has since gained some movement in his upper body.) "When I got to the lowest point, I knew I had to get off drugs to save my life. That's when my life changed. As soon as I was well enough, I started my journey to make good on my promise."

He earned his GED at Hayward Adult School and then searched for a way he could help others. When he found out about Merritt's Community Social Services Program (COSER), he knew that was his calling. Last year Herman received his certificate with a high GPA, multiple awards, and a membership in the Phi Theta Kappa honor society and plans to attend Cal State East Bay.

He is also interning at Second Chances in Hayward to complete the 2200 hours he needs to become state certified. "This is the best job I've ever had. I can't believe they are going to pay me to do this someday," he says. "There's no better feeling than to help someone get their life back."

Herman thanks his instructor Dr. Bill Love for being "tough" on him and the Disability Services folks, including Ron Nelson and Mary Ciddio, for all of their support. Says Mary: "Herman is a determined and humble man and always has a smile on his face. He is an inspiration to us all!"

Herman is in need of a van to take himself to work and school as he cannot sit for long periods without being in a lot of pain. If anyone has resources to help him, please call him directly at (510) 575-7917.

*--Susan May*

*(Herman Roque unfortunately passed away in 2016.)*