Embedded in his Being

University of Dayton

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Embedded in his Being

Ramon Estévez, better known as Martin Sheen, became a graduate of the University of Dayton Sunday morning, saying he was "deeply moved" by the ceremony honoring him for a lifetime of humanitarian action that, at the same time, fulfilled his father's dream for him.
commitment to peace, social justice and human rights, exemplifying the Catholic, Marianist university's mission.

Sheen said the ceremony, in combination with a family reunion the day before, resurfaced his father Francisco in a deeply personal way, and reminded him of the connection between the University and his family. Many members of his extended family were in attendance including sons Ramon and Emilo, grandchildren, four siblings and a host of other extended family members.

"I was not prepared for the deep emotional crack it made in me," he said in an interview after the event. "This was about my dad. I had to come here, I had to celebrate him. I had to recognize him."

He recalled that his father, Francisco, was determined that his son would attend the University of Dayton, putting money aside every month for that purpose. But Sheen, equally determined to go to New York and begin a career in theater, intentionally failed the University's entrance exam to convince his father that college was not for him.

When he accepted a long-standing invitation from the University to receive the honor, Sheen said he had not really focused on the event, but the memories and emotions stirred by his family's reunion put him in a different frame of mind.

"I began to realize that this was a celebration and I was very much a part of it, this University was so important to our lives. I learned last night I was practically born on K Street (now part of campus)," he said. His brothers Frank and Mike graduated from the University and his sister Carmen attended for two years before she left to join his growing family in New York.

"So this community is alive and deeply embedded in my being. And I had to celebrate that and I had not
realized how really moving this would be and how important it would be. It was quite a celebration.

"I have been swept along by this extraordinary truth: that we all come from a place and we all want to stand for something."

Sheen challenged the 1,441 graduates not merely to stand for something but to act on it, to go out and see "the absolute need for justice, healing and mercy that unites us" and to "help heal our broken world wherever we may find it.

"We are all responsible for each other and the world. No one has ever made a contribution without personal suffering, self-sacrifice and some times even death."

Sheen grew up just a few blocks from the University and graduated from Chaminade High School, both founded by the Society of Mary, a Roman Catholic teaching order. He has said the Marianist teachings of the priests and brothers helped shape his commitment to social justice, service and peace.

He has spoken out against war, abortion and capital punishment. Among the causes he has supported are the environment, workers' rights and human rights.

A celebrated actor with a career spanning nearly 50 years, Sheen has achieved fame for performances in the theater, television and film. Among his best-known roles: President Josiah Bartlet in television's The West Wing, a serial killer in the film Badlands and a troubled soldier during the Vietnam War in Apocalypse Now.

A leader in human rights education, the University of Dayton established the nation's first undergraduate human rights studies program. More than 100 students have graduated from the program and pursued careers as human rights advocates and academics or humanitarian professionals in legal, governmental and nonprofit sectors.

For more information, contact Cilla Shindell, director of media relations, at 937-229-3257 or shindell@udayton.edu.