I had a friend with whom I took Japanese class. He was the best student in the class, the most dedicated, and the most naturally gifted. When he talked about Japan I could hear the longing in his voice, it was a part of his being. He wanted more than anything to go to Japan. Now for most of us in the class going to Japan was a shared goal or for some a memory. But none of us had even close to the passion for Japan he did.

One day in class he sat down and said, “Sam I have something to tell you, I had a dream last night, I dreamt I was in japan I was staring at the Tokyo tower and I was so happy. When I woke up I was crying. Sam I want to go there so badly.” I looked at him somewhat confused, “Carlos you will be able to get there, I know we will go together with Mr. Matsumoto!” That’s when I found out, “Sam, I can’t I’m illegal.”

I’m illegal.

At the time I didn’t understand what he meant. He obviously had not been convicted of a crime as he was attending school, not a juvenile detention center. I asked, “What do you mean?”

“I mean I came from Mexico without papers. If I ever leave the country I won’t be allowed back in. If I go to Japan that would mean that I would never get to see my mom again.”

I couldn’t wrap my head around the idea. This person who worked harder than anyone else, who was so passionate about Japan, who deserved his dreams realized. He would be forced to choose between his biggest dream and his mother. An Impossible and completely ridiculous choice, not for a choice he had made, not because he had done something wrong, but because he had been convicted of the “crime” of wanting a better life. His mother wanted for him a life free of dangerous drug cartels, with realistic economic opportunity and a quality education.

To misquote Mark Twain “Love you country ALWAYS. Love your government, when it deserves it.” Right now our government needs tough love. We as a country are not living up to our standards. The American Dream has become an American delusion. From that day I had decided to fight for the idea of equality for all people and devote myself to the goal of achieving a better country.

Since that conversation I have become the vice president and communications director of the Latino Student Alliance as well as done work with the interfaith coalition for immigrant rights known as Together Colorado. I have recently been connected with Northern Colorado Dreamers United.

I realized that I could not stand idly by and complain but I had to do something.