



Gina Martin

‘My father decided to cut ties with me for standing in solidarity’ with #BLM

By Taina Millsap

In June, Gina Martin told her Facebook friends Black Lives Matter. What she didn’t realize is how supporting a nationwide movement for racial justice—one rooted in equity, change, and betterment—would topple her own life.

The junior visual media arts major widely shared her support for systemic change and anti-racist policy on social media at the beginning of summer. Her actions were in line with millions of Americans nationwide who have reinvigorated a modern-day civil rights movement, largely by harnessing the power of the internet.

“I usually never use Facebook, but I went on there and briefly talked about how I thought rioting was a valid form of protest in a very capitalist society that valued goods over Black lives,” Martin said.

But when she encouraged others to protest and donate to charities, her father didn’t like it. Eventually, he cut her off financially.

The loss of her family’s backing puts Martin’s future at Emerson in jeopardy. In an effort to recuperate the money, she decided to start a GoFundMe page dedicated to her education on Aug. 17.

“In the wake of George Floyd’s death, my father decided to cut ties with me for standing in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement,” she wrote in the campaign description. “Furthermore, he chose to no longer support me in attending school. Since June, I have been on my own.”

At the time of publication, the fund had raised more than \$2,800 of its \$15,000 goal—mostly through smaller donations from friends, family, and peers. Martin said some people donated through Venmo as well, and that she has raised around \$3,500 total through the different donation streams.

“For the first three days, anytime I would get a notification that somebody donated, I would start crying,” Martin said.

Martin’s tumultuous journey started within a week after pressing “publish” on her initial Facebook post. Within days, she received multiple phone calls from her father hour after hour. At the time, she was staying with her boyfriend—junior Avery Niles—and his family in Los Angeles. She immediately spoke to her older sister, who advised her not to speak to their father for a couple of days, saying he was very angry with the protests and Martin’s post supporting them.

Instead, Martin texted her dad.

“I was like, ‘Hey, just text me if you need anything,’ I was just trying to diffuse the situation,” she said. “He basically just responded with ‘I’m very mad with what you posted, the family is really angry and you’ve really upset people, I really want to talk to you.’”

When the two finally spoke, Martin's father said her education at a liberal arts school like Emerson was causing her to think and support liberal beliefs.

"My family was never against me going to Emerson, but they were definitely wary of the fact that it was super liberal," she said. "But they knew I was, and it was never a problem in the past. But he was like going off the deep end. He thinks Emerson students are being brainwashed by a liberal Marxist agenda. It's actually insane."

Martin grew up in a small rural North Carolina town called Greensboro. She said that despite its connection to Black culture and the civil rights movement, Greensboro still has a fair amount of racism due to its location in the South.

"I was trying to ignore him, and I said, 'I don't have anything to say to you because if you're really more angry at a Facebook post than at white supremacy, then that's a problem in and of itself...'" Martin said. "Ultimately he said, 'If you want to have these childish views and go about things this way, then you can support yourself.'"

That's when Martin started to worry about how serious her father's threats were. She called her sisters and mother, who is divorced from Martin's father and had no knowledge of the situation, for support.

"I have two older sisters who have both at one point or another cut ties with my dad, and I told them I didn't know what to do, and they just said that he was probably just being dramatic," Martin said. "But then a couple of weeks went on; he didn't talk to me or call me. And then at some point, he sent over my insurance and then cut off my car insurance too."

Niles, her boyfriend, said that being there for her during this time was all he could do. "I've never been through anything like that," Niles said. "So the most I can do is just try to be there for her, talk to her."

Martin later decided it was best for her to stay in L.A. for the fall while working to save up money to return to Emerson in the abbreviated winter semester. Soon after, she appealed to the financial aid office for more money. Though she had requested \$16,000, the office initially only awarded her \$900 and said they could help her secure job opportunities.

But eventually, Martin got an email from Financial Aid Director Angela L. Grant that said she read Martin's letter about her change in circumstances and that she would like to help her. Martin spoke to Grant this morning about her status at Emerson.

"She promised to find me a donor to pay for my remaining tuition costs. She was so unbelievably helpful I almost can't believe it," Martin said. "Combined with the money from the GoFundMe I raised, nearly all my costs will be covered."

Martin said she is not fully certain of when she will receive the aid. But as far as she understands it, her tuition costs for the spring semester will be covered in time.

She is now hoping to take winter semester classes that would last around a month at half price—around \$750 per credit. These costs would be covered by her GoFundMe donations since the financial aid she receives will be applied to the spring semester.

“Spring will definitely be covered, but I’m under the impression that once a donor is secured, the additional aid would be an academic scholarship that repeated itself each semester,” Martin said.

At the moment, Martin said her sisters, friends, boyfriend, and his family have provided her with a good emotional support system.

For the gap semester, Niles and Martin will both be working in L.A. and saving up for future semesters. They may also get their own apartment closer to the city.

“The positive is that we’re both out here trying something out that we wouldn’t at school or certain internships,” Niles said. “It’s a good thing too to just step away from educational life and just kind of see what’s going on out here. We get to switch things up.”

Despite having to take a gap semester away from her education, Martin said she would not change what has happened just to please certain family members.

“I could never say that what my dad thinks is okay just to have his financial support,” Martin said. “It sucks, and it’s really hard, but I would definitely rather stand up for what I believe in than ever stand with him and his side of politics.”