

English 102

Re-entry: assignment 5 part 1

February 26, 2016

Immigration laws: Bumps in the road

Large issues are a significant part of life. They do not just target one person, but a vaster amount of people. Some of these large issues deal with politics, society or health. One issue that I have seen affect my family and friends is immigration laws. Immigration laws present so many bumps in the road for many people who only want to succeed and help their families prosper in this country. Being a daughter of immigrant parents, I have seen a clear example of what most immigrants want here in the United States. They work hard to provide for their families and to have access to greater opportunities. I am thankful that I was able to see my parents' determination to succeed and encourage my siblings and I to achieve our goals in this country.

My mom and dad came to this country around 25 years ago. My dad came to the US two years before my mom did. They had been childhood friends when they were in El Salvador. When my mom wanted to come to the US the only people she knew who were already here were my dad and his family. They helped her pay the costs of immigrating to this country. Two years later my parents decided to form a family. Because they both had siblings and parents to support in El Salvador, they would work in whatever they could find. My dad had two jobs, he worked for Sodexo food services in a hospital during the weekdays and at a hotel in housekeeping on the weekends. My mom worked for Legal Sea Foods during her first months here. She also had a job in a factory that dry-cleaned, packaged and distributed fancy napkins to restaurants. During this time my parents didn't have a legal working permit in this country. Around five years later a law was passed that allowed my parents to have a legal working permit in the US. ^{like what?}

By that time my older brother had been born. Due to health conditions that he was born with my parents decided that only my dad would work and my mom would take care of my brother. Six years later I was born. With two children and a wife to care for my dad worked a lot. His two jobs became full time jobs and I remember that he wasn't around as much because he was constantly working. I have vague memories about this time because I was about 3 or 4 years old. One thing I remember was that during the week he would come home around 2 p.m. I know this because this was the time my favorite show was on. He would eat and rest a little and then leave again to his other job. I wouldn't see him again until the next day at 2 p.m. and the cycle was the same from Monday to Friday. On the weekends my dad didn't work and he would dedicate himself to my brother and I as much as he could. He would take us to the park and play with us. My dad would wake up early on Sundays to watch "Hey, Arnold!" with me. He would take care of us so my mom could run errands. But mostly he enjoyed spending time as a family because during the week he wasn't able to. Then my sister was born. When she was born my dad decided to only keep one of his jobs because it became a more stable job and it gave him very good benefits such as vacations and sick days. The pay had gotten much better than it was when he had first started working there around nine years before. He took this decision to be more involved in our lives and to help my mom out with us. During all of this time, even before I was born my parents had been saving money. It took years to raise the amount they needed but finally the amount was enough to buy a small one family home. This was one of the major steps my parents took because it proved to them that their dreams and goals were possible with determination and hard work. I was four years old when we moved into our house in Lynn, Ma.

During this time, my parents also paid close attention to the changing immigration laws. Now that I am older I know that their working permits had to be renew constantly, every year. I understand that my parents became eligible to apply for US residency due to the amount of years they had been in this country with a working permit and had had no legal problems. They applied for their green cards and in 2004 became legal permanent residents of the US. I remember they celebrated this day. My aunt got my sister and I new dresses to wear because of what my parents had achieved. We had a small celebration at our house. I didn't understand their happiness; I just remember being happy to wear a new dress even though I didn't understand what we were celebrating. I can still picture their happy faces, and the sense of excitement they had. This opened new possibilities for them. One of the major benefits of this was that now my parents could easily go back to their countries and visit my grandparents. Prior to this, it wasn't as easy to travel outside of the US from. But this new legal status allowed my parents to take my siblings and I to El Salvador.

Four years later, the opportunity to enroll in citizenship classes came along. My parents enrolled in the classes. My dad understood English more but my mom didn't so she was afraid because the classes were in English. But they began to take them and little by little they started to learn so much. I remember studying US history with them. Making flashcards and helping my mom pronounce so many words and names that she had trouble with. One of the topics they had to study was the different branches of the US government. My mom could not pronounce "executive branch". Her tongue would get stuck and it would take various attempts for her to pronounce it the best that she could. But she studied vigorously and wrote things down enough times to learn how to spell them and pronounce them. I had recently learned about these topics in school. What was the senate, how many members does the House of Representatives have? Or how many years can a president be in office? I remember that around that time President Obama was working on his presidential campaign. His campaign and my parents' desire to become citizens interested me and I was excited to help them learn so many things that I was learning in my History classes. Their goal to become US citizens is more present in my memory because I was older and remember it like if it was yesterday. The day they had their test, I remember being so nervous. I was so scared that something would go wrong or that my mom, because she was so nervous, would forget everything she had learned. But when they came home and said they passed, we were all beyond excited. My parents now enjoyed benefits that at the time they arrived in this country, they didn't have. They were now eligible to vote. Since they became citizens they've only had the chance to vote for city mayors and members of our city's council. But for this upcoming presidential voting, they are beyond excited to be able to vote. Other benefits they have now are being able to travel with a US passport and the ability to bring family members to this country. Their immigration experience has been a very important base in teaching my siblings and I the importance of determination and of achieving our dreams.

Fast forwarding six years, I am now 18 years old and have my own dreams. I am in college to pursue my dream career. But during the time that I was applying to colleges I realized how much immigration laws affected the people that I cared for. In this case it wasn't my parents anymore, but my friends. One of my friends is Joy, and she is an immigrant. I do not say this in a bad way. I say this because it is a truth that is often seen as a disadvantage, when it shouldn't be. What I mean is that I feel like many people who do not have a legal status in this country are not given the opportunities that would allow them to accomplish great things in this country.

Joy was born in Honduras and came to this country when she was 6 years old. She went to regular public schools and learned how to speak English very well. I remember being in the same

classroom as her in 7th and 8th grade and I know how smart she is. Throughout high school she was in the track and volleyball teams. She also was involved in community service projects such as the ALS walk to raise awareness for people who live with this condition. She was part of the Honor Society at school and also had a summer job for the last two years of high school. She worked as an assistant to the school's secretary. But besides all of those wonderful things that compliment her résumé, Joy is a great friend. We have known each other since we were 9 years old. We have celebrated birthdays and achievements together. We have grown up treating each other more like family than friends. In our church, we volunteer together to work with children, teaching them Bible stories. One of the things I like the most about my friendship with Joy is that since we were little we have always dreamed together about our futures. We have shared what career we want and what plans we have for the future. From traveling to Spain and France to going on mission trips to third world countries, we have many dreams.

One of the dreams we would talk about a lot was going to college. We were in 8th grade when we began talking about it. We had so many questions and weren't really sure what we wanted to major in. Whenever we had the chance to, we would talk about new career interests and before we knew it, we were visiting colleges, going to college fairs and narrowing down our choices. Joy and I would rarely talk about her legal status here in the US. We didn't know how that would affect her college plans and when we did talk about it, it would make her sad. She would say how much easier it was for students born in this country to go to college. Often she would be disappointed to hear that somebody with the opportunity to go to college, was wasting the opportunity she wished she had. But during our junior year in high school she benefitted from the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy. Which is a policy that allowed immigrant youth who entered the country before their 16th birthday and before June 2007 to have a permit that allows them to work and potentially further their education without being deported. Joy was beyond happy about this. I remember she hugged me excitedly one day. She said, "my permit came in today I can finally apply to college and job applications!" She had longed to go to college since she was very little but her parents had told her that college was very expensive and because of her immigration status in the US it was even harder for her to go to college. But DACA was a ray of sunshine for her just when she needed it. DACA allowed her to apply to the job that she had during high school and it also made it possible for her to apply for college.

It was during this experience that I started to realize the effect immigration had on my loved ones. It wasn't the same for everyone. My parents were able to become citizens and now enjoyed the benefits of US citizenship, but not everybody had their opportunity.

When Joy and I began applying to colleges, we also looked for as many scholarships as we could find. We would get flyers from our advisors or google all these different types of scholarships. But I noticed that my friend couldn't apply to the same scholarships I was applying to. Most scholarships had as one of their requisites, "Be a US citizen". In many of the scholarships we looked into, Joy couldn't apply because she wasn't a citizen of the US. When it came time to filling out the FAFSA the same thing happened. Joy wasn't eligible to receive financial aid and was limited to applying to just a few scholarships. I know this was a bummer for her. She searched for as many scholarships as she could and received some money to help out with her tuition. It hurt me to see her stress over not being able to afford college tuitions because she wasn't eligible to receive financial aid or awards. It confused me how being a citizen or not could be a bump in the road of education for someone who only wanted to prosper.

After this experience I thought about this a lot. When I was little I didn't understand the

effect that immigration laws would have on students like Joy when the time for college and job applications came around. I didn't understand that they do not have the same privileges that I have such as financial aid for tuition, or how I have an advantage over them when it comes to certain jobs or scholarships that they cannot apply for because they are not US citizens. I didn't know these things until I saw her go through these situations. It was upsetting to me to see her struggle to apply to colleges and search, with little luck, for any type of financial aid that she could get. Why couldn't she have the same opportunities that I have? Why weren't her good grades and high SAT scores enough? Why does having or not having US citizenship matter when she is clearly a great student and potentially a great academically prepared addition to society? I realized that many students are not able to further their academic careers because of the lack of financial aid or because of their legal status in this country. Not just students, but many people have to pause their academic dreams or have to give them up because they do not have the financial means to pay their tuitions. Not only that but also many people who do not have a legal status in this country, do not have steady jobs or jobs they wish to have. Some people lack medical insurance because of their status in this country as well. I believe more should be done for immigrants. They should be able to have a medical insurance no matter what state they live in in the United States. Students and people who want to further their education should also be eligible for financial aid and awards regardless of their immigration status in this country. This political issue affects a very large group of people who are part of this country. It doesn't just affect a single person but also their family and friends. This is an issue that involves entire families and communities and I believe it is time for a significant change that will benefit people like Joy who really deserve to reach their goals.

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