

An Immigrant Mother's Letter

By Ana Rosa Cecena - an immigrant and a paralegal at Global Law Advocates

I was born in a small town in Nayarit, Mexico. Like many immigrants, our circumstances in Mexico forced us to risk our lives and come to this country. My mother became sick shortly after giving birth to me; she had four unsuccessful surgeries in Mexico. My parents decided that they had to seek medical attention in the U.S. My mother and I came here undocumented, we crossed the desert walking; I was only four years old at the time. My father was already here in the US, he had been granted lawful temporary resident status through the amnesty for agricultural workers. For many years my mother and I lived in fear of being picked up by immigration. I was constantly reminded by my parents that I could not tell anyone that we were here undocumented. I know what it is to fear “la migra”, I know what it is like to not know English, and I know how it feels to not be welcome in a country where I have spent the majority of my life.

Eventually, my father was able to petition for my mother and me to adjust our status. In 1997 he became a U.S. citizen and because of that I became an automatic citizen. From that moment forward, I have worked hard to be where I am at today. I want to prove to my parents that every sacrifice they made and every risk they took for me has been worth it. My parents saved up enough money to pay for my college, and in 2008 I graduated from the University of Washington here in Seattle. I have been working as a paralegal for immigration attorney Margaret O'Donnell since 2009. My mother won her citizenship in 2007 and since then we have practiced our right to vote.

The 2016 Presidential Election

Yesterday morning, I had one of the most difficult talks with my five-year-old son. Throughout the past year, my son has heard my husband and me comment about the presidential candidates. On one occasion he overheard us talking about what we would do if Donald Trump won the election and what that would mean for us, people of color and immigrants. He heard us repeat several of the horrific things he said about us Mexicans. He even heard us say that if he won we would go live in Mexico, because he did not want us here in this country. We did not realize how much fear we put into our son from that moment. He is a very intelligent and curious child and asks thousands of questions daily. For several weeks, he asked us almost daily, is President Obama still our president? He told us with much concern that he did not want to leave his school, his friends, or much less his home. We began to ensure him that it would not be so, my husband and I even began to believe that it was not possible for a man like that, spreading so much hate, would be elected.

On Tuesday November 8, like millions of others, we were sick to our stomachs watching how this man won state after state. We put our children to bed early, while we still had hope. Yesterday morning my son woke up early, while my husband and I were getting ready for work. With great enthusiasm he asked “mommy do you know who will be our president yet?” I felt my heart stop for a moment, my mind racing, thinking about what I was going to say to my five-year-old son. I told him we did know and that Donald Trump had won. My child burst into tears, his face full of terror. He told me that several of the parents of his school friends had voted for

Trump. He asked me “why would people vote for a bad man that wants to force us out of our home?”

My Message as an Immigrant Mother to My Son

“My love, in this world there are all sorts of people. We are all different and we are all unique. Our distinctions are what make each one of us special, for example, being bilingual is a super power that not everyone has. In fact there are some people that know many languages. There will be people that do not accept that others are different from them. These people are afraid of what they consider unknown and often do things that will harm us or make us feel bad. Just as you should never mock someone who is different from you, no one should make you feel inferior about your differences. If someone tells you something that makes you feel bad about yourself, your parents or anyone else, I want you to think well before you react. The only way we can triumph over evil is by doing something to change the situation. If someone wants to humiliate you for any reason, it is because they do not understand this difference, educate them. Ignorance is not cured by ignorance. I want you to always be kind. This is your country; you have the right to live in this country. We will not live in fear and we will not allow hatred to triumph.”

The Path Forward

Immigrant parents, today we have shed many tears, we are very disappointed, and we are terrified of what is going to happen. We do not know how we will protect our children or how we will protect ourselves. We are not alone in this, now more than ever we must unite. Talk to your children, make a plan, prepare them, answer their questions, and be patient with them. Ask them about what they are hearing in school. What their teachers and other classmates are saying. Ask them about their fears and discuss possible solutions to certain situations. If you find out that your child is being harassed or bullied at school, go to their school. Speak to the principal, ask for an interpreter if needed, and make sure the issue is resolved. School is a place for learning and we must help make it a safe environment for all children.

My fear and disappointment is more so because this means that there are enough people in the US who agree with the things this man is saying, they believe that this is correct, they applaud his humiliations towards us, and they think that setting back history will make this country better. I am horrified that the people who voted for him and support him are my neighbors; they are parents of children going to my son’s school. They are people I share the road with on my way to work, people at the same stores I shop at, and people attending and working at clinics and libraries I go to. I fear that while I’m driving I will be pulled over, dragged out of my car and beaten up because I look like an undocumented immigrant. It fills me with great sadness to know that there are so many people feeding off of these fears that we feel; people that approve these acts of violence.

My husband and I have worked so hard to teach our children to embrace their two cultures, to be proud to know our language and to have love for the country that our family came from. How do I explain to five-year-old child, whom does not care about the color of someone else’s skin and simply sees them as a human being, that he will come across people who hate us, without even knowing us, just because of the color of our skin or the place where we or our parents were born.

It is not fair that we have to talk to our children, citizens of this country, about the possibility of being victims of racism, hatred, humiliation. It is not fair that our U.S. citizen children are afraid to go to school. It is not fair that our U.S. citizen children are afraid to come home to find out that their parents have been deported.

All residents and citizens of this country, we must continue to be the voices of all our immigrant people that this country has silenced. We need to continue to fight for our human rights, we will no longer live in fear, and we must protect one another. We came to this country to offer our children a better future than the one we could have given them in our country. Let us show our children that we will not let fear overcome us. We did not risk our lives coming to this country for our children to live in fear. Always remember that love and compassion are greater than hatred and evil.