

My Name is: Gabriel Rodriguez

My Nationality is: Salvadoran American?

My Occupation is: Student

My Immigration Status is: Undocumented

Story: There is a question about my nationality because I was brought to the United States when I was only a few weeks old. I have always considered myself to be an American. I grew up here, I played here, and I learned here, my life was here, but I was born in El Salvador. Now I am a senior in high school, I'm towards the top of my class, and I realize that I am indeed not an American, at least not legally. Despite having done everything like all of my other documented classmates, I am denied the same future. I cannot attend the same schools anymore, I've been denied access to the next step, and the one that will help me get that job I want, the one which represents my "American dream."

Why did you leave your country?

Why did you come to the United States specifically?

What gifts can you contribute to your community?

How can our community be welcoming to you?

Adapted from an exercise developed by Sister Nancy Sylvester, IHM. Used by permission.

My Name is: Kaylan Sites

My Occupation is: Wife

My Nationality is: Irish

My Immigration Status is: Undocumented – now US Citizen

Story: I came to the United States at the urging of my US citizen husband Andrew. I didn't need a visa so this wasn't hard. Andrew promised to file a lawful permanent resident application on my behalf. Once I arrived, Andrew regularly beat me, routinely threatening to kill me and keep me in isolation. I avoided seeking help because I feared reprisal by my husband and deportation. Finally, Andrew broke my jaw and three ribs, sending me to the emergency room where medical staff referred me to law enforcement and a local Catholic Charities immigration program. There I was presented with legal, social service and immigration options. I entered a shelter with my two children, pressed charges and had Andrew sent to prison. Additionally, I applied to be a lawful permanent resident without Andrew's assistance and my application was approved. While I am happy that my situation has improved, I worry that there are many other women and children scared to get out of abusive situations. I would not have been aware of this program had I not been in the emergency room. Other women might not be as lucky, if you could call it that.

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My Name is: Sammy Nuko

My Occupation is: Multiple jobs

My Nationality is: Togolese

My Immigration Status is: Asylum case, now US Citizen

Story: In 1998 I was captured by the military for participating in a demonstration protesting election fraud by the government and was forced to undress and placed in a dark, filthy cell without food or water for days. During my interrogation, a soldier struck me in the face so hard that I'm now blind in my right eye. Three years later, in 2001 I suffered another attack, being severely beaten, but managed to escape. As I no longer felt safe I fled Togo for the United States, with my pregnant wife and four children moving to Ghana where we were safe from violence but exposed to malaria and poor water conditions. After two years of applications and hearings I was granted political asylum, and after working three jobs and going through more intensive paperwork, the rest of my family was granted asylum in 2006. While I know that I'll never be able to get those five years apart from my family back I am glad I'm safe. I know that some who apply for asylum aren't so lucky and are detained. While working three jobs was not ideal, I couldn't imagine having had to leave the violence and jail time in my country of origin only to be placed in a jail in this one.

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My Name is: Ramon Lopez

My Occupation is: Day laborer

My Nationality is: Mexican

My Immigration Status is: Undocumented

Story: I live in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Six days a week I wake up at 2:00 am to cross the US-Mexico border to El Paso. Once there, a farm labor contractor recruits me for work so I, with other laborers, cram into an unsafe bus without seats. The bus departs El Paso for a two-hour journey to the chili fields of Dell City, Texas, arriving at 5:00 am. When we arrive, we assemble in the cold and wait for an hour for the trucks carrying chili collection buckets. I receive a bucket, about 3.5 feet high, and begin working diligently, hunched over and picking chilies. I will receive fifty cents per bucket, but when I bring my bucket to the truck to empty it, my supervisor steps down on the chilies and sends me back to the field to fill the bucket even more. I work all day, making less than 5.15 an hour. There are no restrooms or portable toilets and breaks are few. At 4:00 pm I start the long journey home just to go to bed and get up to do the same thing the next day. Sometimes it is hard to convince myself that this terrible work is worth it, but as I leave each day I see the town and think to myself "are there any alternatives?"

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