

I like telling people that I get paid to help gather Zion, but becoming an immigration attorney always felt like the stereotypical career path for me as a Latina from Compton, CA. Throughout my BYU Law career, I resisted immigration law's pull. Stereotypes are something Compton natives know well as our city's reputation from the late 80's and 90's precedes it. We as residents are often pestered with requests of our own "survival stories" from the hood. But the Compton I know and love is best represented by the scripture memorialized on a mural just outside of city hall, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden" (Matthew 5:14). Walking by this mural in my hometown always filled me with a sense of pride—just like my often misjudged city, I have a light to share with the world.

In my third year of law school, rather than stubbornly fight the perceived stereotype of a Latina Immigration Attorney, one experience caused me to truly lean in.

Dilley, TX is a blink of a town with a population of just over 3,000 residents about 85 miles north of the Mexican border. Its claims to fame are, in no particular order, a Men's prison, petroleum wells, Bobby's Taco Truck, and the South Texas Family Residential Center—one of the largest migrant detention facilities housing women and children. As a law student, my role was to prepare the women and children detained there for their credible fear interviews, a screening process for migrants to demonstrate to the interviewing officers that there is a "significant possibility" that they will be persecuted in their countries of origin.

The women detained in Dilley had either presented themselves at the border while seeking asylum, or had crossed without authorization and come into contact with immigration officials shortly thereafter. For a week each day, I was subjected to a TSA-like security inspection. We used clear backpacks for our items to make the process go smoother. As I entered the visitation trailer each morning, I was greeted with a chorus of "buenos dias" by female detainees dressed in standard issued colored sweats and matching beanies. These women would wait patiently, sometimes for hours on end, hoping for a chance of some semblance of legal counsel.

For five days of twelve hour shifts, I'd patiently and empathetically listen to each of these women share with me the darkest experiences of their lives: extortion, extreme gang violence, government corruption, domestic violence—in some cases, all of the above. And yet, at some point in the stories of their crossing each woman would confide in me, "*Yo se que Dios estaba con nosotros.*" I know that God was with us. Each woman would also tearfully explain that the perilous journey she had embarked on had not been a planned one, but one taken out of desperation, a last measure to protect the child or children she had brought with her.

At some point in the week, the stories got to be too much. I felt mentally worn as I heard some of the worst things humans can do to each other repeatedly described. I slipped away to the bathroom in our visitation trailer, the closest semblance to privacy that I had, and said a prayer, "Heavenly Father, I don't think I can do this. This is too heavy; the darkness is more than I can bear." In response I heard, "If not you, then who? Who will bring the light?" These impressions were also followed with the words of a familiar hymn with some slight modification:

*Savior, may I learn to love thee,
Walk the path that thou hast shown,
Pause to help and lift another,
Finding strength beyond my own.
Savior, may I learn to love thee—
Lord, I would follow thee.*

*I would be my [sister's] keeper;
I would learn the healer's art.
To the wounded and the weary
I would show a gentle heart.
I would be my [sister's] keeper—
Lord, I would follow thee.*

At this moment, I knew my path forward was clear. I had gone to Dilley with a desire to help and a curiosity about our nation's immigration laws, but I left Dilley with a calling.

What I didn't realize then was just how close of a connection I shared with the women in Dilley. As a 1.5 generation American, I knew that my ancestral homelands were just across the southern border. But while I knew where my family originated from, I didn't quite know the *how* of my ancestor's path to legalization and integration into this nation. During my first year of practice, I decided to explore my ancestors' journeys to America and requested my maternal grandparents' immigration records.

Through this request, I learned that my own grandfather had been detained at the southern border near El Paso, TX. He had been young, newly married, and depended on the help of a local non-profit attorney, Cleofas Calleros of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, for legal representation to allow him to stay in this country. In 1951, my maternal grandfather, Jesus Raul Quesada, had his day in immigration court and applied to have his deportation suspended. As part of his case, my grandfather had to demonstrate that he was a person of good moral character and that his deportation would result in serious economic detriment to his U.S. Citizen spouse. Because of Attorney Calleros' advocacy, my grandfather's application for relief was granted.

I never met Cleofas Calleros, but his legal representation changed the course of my life long before I came into existence. His representation brought light to one of my grandfather's darkest moments and his work changed the destinies of subsequent generations, including my own.

As a student of the law school, I studied the laws of men in the light of the laws of God and drew upon the teachings of the world's greatest advocate—our Savior Jesus Christ. He was an advocate who both represented and healed “the least of these.”

In my work today, I continue to draw upon His light. I experience miracles often as my mind is frequently illuminated with creative solutions for my clients' cases. As an immigration attorney,

my day to day labors are truly “for the benefit of the world.” In my current role, I provide direct representation to students, faculty, and staff in the California State University and California Community College systems. My BYU education has equipped me with the tools to preserve family unity, plead the cause of the poor and needy, and bring needed hope and light in the darkest of times.