

## **Terry Bryant Law School Scholarship Essay**

Despite the change that has occurred throughout my life, my desire to serve humanity has remained constant. In high school, I used my Spanish language skills to assist Latin American refugee students with their homework and cultural transition. In college, I focused my internship at U.S. Embassy Madrid on highlighting human trafficking trends and illegal animal poaching. Upon graduation, I worked for the U.S. Department of State's Foreign Service which exposed me to injustices across the globe and solidified my desire to advocate for underrepresented communities. The crux of my decision to become a lawyer lies here.

My first Foreign Service assignment was to Consulate General Monterrey, Mexico where I spent two years adjudicating temporary agricultural visas (referred to as H-2), and quickly becoming a passionate advocate for these workers' employment and human rights. Each day I interviewed Mexican workers who were seeking entry to the United States with the hopes of alleviating their families' impoverished living conditions with American wages. Unfortunately, these interviews often revealed the horrid and inhumane conditions awaiting them in returning to their seasonal employer. Appalled by the actions of my fellow Americans, I pushed for internal investigations of these cases, even creating a Fraud Prevention Unit to process them, but rarely did they catch the interest of domestic law enforcement. This meant that these awful deeds largely went unpunished, with employers continuing to abuse workers without consequence year after year. With scarce employment opportunities in Mexico, many of these workers felt obligated to return to these farms and endure the unthinkable conditions to support their families. Our hearts broke together as I issued the visas, feeling powerless.

My discouragement did not stop me from trying to make change. I spent one year as the lead of the H-2 Visa Team at the largest H-2 processing post in the world and led a

reorganization of the fraud division that uncovered one of the largest human trafficking rings in the history of the United States. I was invited to discuss fraud trends and trafficking prevention at a national agricultural employers' convention and published unprecedented cables that changed the structure of H-2 adjudication worldwide in an effort to protect workers' rights. These experiences fueled my desire to assist those in need, leading me to bid for a position at Embassy Kabul, Afghanistan, to work on Afghan Special Immigrant Visas. Nobody could have predicted how the next year would unfold.

My year at Embassy Kabul was one filled with endless work, dizzying chaos, and powerful frustration. Most of my time was spent interviewing Afghan families applying for Special Immigrant Visas who were attempting to escape Taliban threats. These visas are reserved for Afghans "who provided faithful and valuable service to the U.S. government, while employed by or on behalf of the U.S. government in Afghanistan," making them a primary target for Taliban forces. These were the people who built our home at the Embassy, translated for our military, and worked alongside us every day. While so many of these people were clearly in dire need, senseless red tape allowed the government to extend its hand only so far. With tears in my eyes, I was forced to separate parents from their children, dismiss pleas for help from those terrorized by the Taliban, and finally abandon my own Afghan colleagues during the emergency evacuation of the Embassy last August. After reading the legal reasonings for these harsh standards, I felt that not only were these policies inhumane, but they were out of touch with the reality of our globalized world. This catastrophic diplomatic mess was the perfect representation of the widening logic gap between Washington lawmakers and overseas policy-implementers, and I was witnessing its life-or-death consequences firsthand.

After the closure of Embassy Kabul, I returned home with yet another broken heart. However, while all my possessions may have been left behind, my passion to fight for justice came back with me ablaze. Motivated to mend this bureaucratic deficiency, I left my position with the State Department knowing that law school would provide me with a better opportunity to create a more humane and civilized legal system for those who work in and for the United States. Receiving financial support for my legal education will allow me to focus my efforts on my studies, community service, and experiential learning. Someday, like all good lawyers, I hope to make lasting change that will help others - a scholarship from Terry Bryant Law Firm will allow me to focus on doing just that.