

It is 9:00AM on Saturday morning, and my staff and I are huddled together in a small high school classroom discussing last minute preparations. There is a long line of people slowly registering. I am about to lead our naturalization workshop where my regional team gathers to assist 100 noncitizens in applying for U.S. citizenship. There is a tangible excitement in the air among the individuals gathered here from all over the world. There is also fear of the unknown. Immigration law is complicated and full of unexpected challenges. My staff of attorneys and Department of Justice accredited representatives are here to empower each individual to understand their case and make an informed decision whether to apply or not. We hope to be clear and concise and to remind every noncitizen of their dignity and their rights.

My role for the next eight hours is to lead the legal team, including a half dozen pro bono attorneys volunteering from several large law firms. As the legal supervisor, I am there to ensure we provide the highest quality legal services we can. I will support the legal team by helping analyze complex cases and determining whether we will represent an individual. Sometimes, in moments like these, I am struck by the fact that I am not an attorney. Despite not having a law degree, my life and hard work have brought me this opportunity to lead a team of legal representatives in serving the immigrant community. Here are some of my own reflections on how it is that I came to such a place in my career and why law school is the best next step for me. I explore three themes that flow through the story of my life: immigration, advocacy, and leadership.

My choice to pursue a career in immigration laws stems in my upbringing as well as the past decade of working with immigrants. My perspective and values in life are shaped by having lived in four different countries and learned three different languages. These changes in geography, language, and culture have helped me become someone who can meet people where

they are and assist them with compassion and empathy. It has given me a broader perspective on life, which even now helps me as I manage staff from different walks of life and countries. These past years of working with immigrants has also revealed to me the urgent need for increased access to affordable legal assistance, particularly in immigration law, which is a constantly shifting landscape. Our legal aid office has worked to increase our capacity, and yet, we are still unable to help hundreds of immigrants who call our office each month. I am committed to helping bring more affordable legal services to the immigrant community and to becoming a leader that will effect changes in immigration law and policy.

I have learned about the power of advocacy through the examples of others in my life. My father is a minister, and my mother is a therapist. Not only did they instill in me a desire to help others, but they also showed me the value of education as a tool of advocacy. When I was in middle school, my father obtained his doctorate, and my mother obtained another Master of Arts. Their education was always presented to me as a means to increase their impact in the lives of others. My wife works as a therapist for children who have been sexually abused, and is a daily reminder of the difficult, yet rewarding, work of walking alongside and advocating for the vulnerable. My parents and spouse have exemplified the value of empowering others to find their voice and be part of meeting their own needs and healing their wounds. In 2012, when I first began to work in immigration law, my supervisor and mentor taught me how to advocate for immigrant survivors of violence by defending their rights before law enforcement and immigration. These individuals, and others, have shaped my value and desire for seeking justice and bringing dignity to those around me.

In my life, leadership has not necessarily been something I have sought out, but more something that was given to me. Starting in high school, I was encouraged to take positions of

leadership, such as class president. In college, I was asked to lead a summer program of students working in hostels in Europe to gain leadership experience abroad. At World Relief, only a few years after having started my work in immigration law, I was asked to become a speaker in community events and a trainer for new staff. Soon after, I was promoted to a senior role and then legal supervisor, even above others with more experience and education than myself. Throughout these experiences, I have come to realize how much more impact I am capable of in positions of leadership. In each role I am given, however long it may last, I have sought to pursue excellence and humility, surrounding myself with others who will help me become a better advocate, better trainer, and a better leader.

I am confident that my next step in this journey of advocacy for immigrants lies in law school. Although I am grateful for the impact of my work thus far, I am excited to advocate for immigrants at a different level once I have completed my law studies. In my current role, I am well aware of my limitations in legal writing, legal research, and trial advocacy. I also seek to better understand areas of law that intersect with immigration law, such as tax, criminal, and family law. I will pursue my law degree with academic rigor and excellence, knowing that the skills and knowledge that I will learn will help me be a greater leader and advocate within the immigrant community. The Terry Bryant Scholarship would support me in achieving this dream and goal without having to be hindered by the heavy weight of debt.