

UN ASTRO DE NITIDA LUZ

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I was named Karla after my father. A few weeks before I was born, my father Carlos, a fisherman, almost boarded the *Nettie H*, set to depart from Seattle to Alaska. My mother stopped him from getting on the boat, insisting that he had to be with her in Honduras the day I was born. A month later, in September of 1993, the *Nettie H* disappeared with all five crew members presumed drowned.

Even still, for a long time, I never believed in fate or luck. Growing up in an immigrant community where steadfast resilience was the norm, by ten years old I was convinced that hard work alone made anything possible. By now, I see how naïve I was. I've faced obstacles of my own as a Honduran-American, as an advocate for immigrant youth fleeing the same country my parents fled decades ago, and as an aspiring attorney existing in a world where my Honduran community has become the nation's scapegoat. In facing those obstacles, I've learned it takes more than just hard work.

ACHIEVING THE AMERICAN DREAM

Twenty-five years after immigrating, my parents have achieved the American dream. My father, the former fisherman, has two bachelor's degrees, and my mother, whose first jobs in the U.S. included cleaning houses and housekeeping at a nursing home, has a master's degree. That success came at a price. My parents worked hard every day of their lives. Sleeping four hours a night was typical for them during my entire youth. When my mother was in her early twenties, she went to the hospital, sure she was having a heart attack. Her doctor told her that she was not dying, but she had developed heart burn due to stress.

My childhood memories of my parents are as limited as their time was. I felt guilty even asking them to come to parent-teacher conferences, not to mention school field trips. Their constant grind meant that they could not take the time to reconcile the trauma they experienced growing up in a struggling country in the throes of a militarized neoliberal U.S. presence. Their resilience in light of that trauma, and in the face of the racism, sexism, and people who underestimated their abilities every day is undeniable. But their hard work alone did not get them to where they are now. They had help.

My family helped; my grandmothers stepped in to basically raise me and my brother through high school while my parents worked and pursued their degrees. My family also received institutional help; my brother and I benefitted from WIC in the first few years after my mother immigrated, and I took part in the Head Start preschool program in Seattle. I was lucky to have grandmothers that were willing to uproot themselves from the place they most loved for my parents to invest in their future and

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I was lucky to grow up in a city that prioritized social welfare. My family's story could have played out very differently absent the support and pure auspiciousness of our trajectory.

LEARNING TO BE AN ADVOCATE WITH MY COMMUNITY

When I was a child, most people didn't know what or where Honduras was. Now, all they believe is that it is a violent, gang-infested place of poverty. During the two years I spent working as a legal caseworker in detention centers across Houston, I heard the stories of children whose beginnings were similar to my parents', but who are now battling even more militarized, insular, and overt racism toward Hondurans.

Every day I had the privilege of standing in front of a room of about thirty teenagers, survivors who had traversed multiple countries to reunite with their family or simply to be safe. Upon hearing my *voseo*, they would ask where I was from, and many would tell me how grateful they were to speak to another Honduran. Recognizing that their journey inherently meant these children understood and fought for their basic human rights, I began my presentations by learning from them. I would ask the children what they thought their rights were. They would shout out "the right to nutrition," "the right to clean clothing," "the right to feel safe in the place where I'm living," "the right to love whoever I want regardless of sex or gender."

HOW THE REST OF THE WORLD SEES MY COMMUNITY

Trump portrays Central American immigrants as tough gang members, coming here to murder and rape. The left portrays them as abused, innocent, victimized children in need of a savior. *Nobody gets it right*. As a Central American raised to be proud of where I come from and knowing how beautiful and multi-faceted my community is, nothing I hear on the news reflects that. Worst of all, the voices I hear are almost never Honduran voices.

I see my community as I see my parents, the families who immigrate here every day, and myself. They are fearless visionaries, determined to find solutions for themselves and their families. They are ahead of their time. We are the future.

NAVIGATING THE FIRST YEAR OF LAW SCHOOL AS A HONDURAN-AMERICAN

Existing as a law student for the past few months as a Honduran-American has been frustrating, exhausting, disheartening, and enlightening all at once. Despite the absurdity of Trump labeling a group of thousands of people that he knows nothing about "criminals," I felt personally attacked. I thought about the hundreds of children I met as a caseworker. Despite the trauma they endured at home and on the journey, they were still children. They laughed; they played; they cared about what their friends thought of them. I thought about my parents, who have given so much to this country as nurses who care for Americans every day. I thought of my father, who took on the riskiest jobs for the benefit of this country. I thought of the immigrants I see every day as I walk to law school, literally building this country from the ground up.

Personally, I was trying to tease holdings out of opinions by judges that upheld bigotry and racism again and again while also being bombarded with images of my community suffering everywhere. I saw images of despondent Central American

children on click bait articles every time I logged into Facebook. I heard Trump's rhetoric demonizing Central American immigrants in class as my Constitutional Law professor apologetically fleshed out the government's argument for declaring the immigration of Central Americans a national emergency. There was a point in the middle of the semester when I saw a graphic video as I was scrolling through my Facebook feed of a group of grown men beating up a boy in Mexico. After that, I disconnected from social media.

Throughout law school, my bed has been my refuge from stress. In the past few months, my efforts to cope with the demonization of my community have invaded even that safe space. Every night while in bed, I think about the people on the caravan. I wonder if they ate that day. I imagine how tired they must be. I optimistically hope that they are resting together, protecting each other, as my community always does. I have never been a religious person, but as a child, I fell asleep to my grandmother murmuring her prayers in Spanish in the bed next to me. Now, I reiterate positive thoughts from my head into the universe, trying to send strength and love to them somehow.

WHO WE TRULY ARE

These past few months have felt like a personal attack, and part of the reason is that in many ways the families on the caravan are no different from my own. These families are just as hardworking and communitarian as my parents are. My mother and I were only able to immigrate to the U.S. because my father was a citizen. The fact that I was born in August of 1993, and not May or December, prevented my father from getting on that boat and therefore my mother from becoming a widowed teen mother stuck in Honduras. It meant that I could grow up in this country and go to preschool even if my parents did not have the means to pay for my preschool. It meant that I had a shot at going to one of the best universities in the world. It meant that I did not have to be scared that I would be touched by strange men on my bus ride to school, like my mother was as a teenager. Striving for a shot at that does not make a person a criminal or a victim. It makes her a survivor.