

Caitlin's Tough Conversations Immigration Story - The Rranxburgaj Family

At Michigan United, part of my duties has been working with people who are immigrants, doing an intake interview with them to refer them to the right immigration attorney for their issue. **All of them want to be legal and want citizenship.** Some of them are documented and need to get their green cards, but the majority of the ones I've worked with have been undocumented. And it's really an upsetting job, because out of all the people we do intakes for, **hardly any of them can get legal. There is no way for them to apply for a visa or a green card or to get in line for citizenship or anything.**

One family I have worked with, the Rranxburgaj family. They came from Albania 20 years ago. Things were a mess in Albania after communism fell, no jobs, people shooting each other in the streets for money, and they had a newborn. Some of their relatives had gotten asylum in the United States, and lived in Detroit, so they decided to come here to try to get asylum, **to make a good life for their baby.**

They crossed the border, and within six months applied for asylum, which is how you legally apply for asylum (if you are really fleeing a bad situation, you can't sit there and wait in your country to apply since it can take years to get an answer).

So it took them **six years** to get an answer. And in that time, they got **work permits, social security cards, they started paying taxes**, and they had another son! So they had begun a life, and after about 5 years, the wife, Flora, was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. And then a year later they found out that they did not get asylum, because they weren't personal victims of violence or political refugees, like their relatives were. They were officially undocumented. And they are still to this day.

But they weren't deported. The government allowed them to stay here, undocumented, on a humanitarian basis due to Flora's Multiple Sclerosis. So they kept working, **paying taxes**, paying their immigration attorney, **going to ICE check ins** every year or every month, and **they thought - if they keep doing everything right, that at some point they should somehow be eligible for citizenship.** They had **so much hope** coming to America, and that if they kept doing everything our government asked, they'd get citizenship. But they've also been **afraid** that their life would be torn from them, never getting citizenship.

And then in 2017, ICE told them that they were going to deport the husband, Ded. And at this point, Flora is in a wheelchair and is totally dependent on him for food, getting bathed and dressed, everything. **They are terrified** that she is going to have to figure out how to survive here without him. The youngest son is still in high school, the older son has DACA, so he is at risk of deportation too. And **there is and has been no solution in our system for them in the 20 years they've been here.**

And **I feel scared** that I can't stop it! We moved them into a church to defy the deportation and to give ICE a chance to do the right thing, but they haven't, and they're still living there two years later.