

Mishaps and Heartache

Sarah Huacuja

I am an all-American Jewish student minus one detail; I am not American. Not by choice but by a series of errors committed by the Immigration Naturalization Offices. Unfortunately, my story — of countless mishaps that resulted from flaws in the system — is not unique.

Every Mexican immigrant story begins with a transition from Mexico to the United States. My story does not include lonely and frightening explorations in the desert or jumping fences. My story includes a visa and my grandparents (U.S. citizens) escorting my sister and me into the U.S. as our legal guardians. We speak fluent English, and America was where we were meant to be.

It all began in 2000 when my grandfather submitted papers for my sister. Her process couldn't have been smoother; within two years she received the almighty *Welcome to the United States of America* letter. During that period, my grandfather began the process for my immigration. As a minor, I was eligible for citizenship rather than legal residency, which was how my sister had been registered.


So began a trail of mistakes, frustrations, and a broken dream. My documentation was entered and the fee was paid, and we received a tiny piece of paper stating that my papers were "in process." After not hearing from the immigration office, my concerned grandmother and aunt visited the offices and were told that I was not eligible for citizenship but rather legal residency. The wrong documentation had been submitted and my process had to be restarted. My grandmother had to sign a release form, claiming she — and not the office — had made the mistake, although they had claimed originally I could be given citizenship. But the office offered a promising solution and guaranteed that I would have my residency within six months. A month later the office returned the check, stating that since we had already paid for the initial documentation no additional payment was necessary.

Having been accepted as a freshman to the University of Arizona for the fall of 2006, we became worried that my immigration status had not been finalized. We visited the immigration office several times, and I was questioned by an officer about my life, as in, had I ever worked illegally. Without a Social

Security number, or alien number, I could not enroll at the university. During the summer we received a letter stating, "No pending application. Cannot file for adjustment." The reason given was that my grandparents cannot sponsor my immigration since they are not my near relatives and they did not adopt me before the age of sixteen (they had earlier been told that legal guardianship was enough since my biological mother is dead and the whereabouts of my father are unknown). So I have no near relatives who can sponsor me.

The battle continues, and my sister's documentation has been revoked because "it was wrongfully given to her."

I am eighteen years old. I can't drive to school because I need a Social Security number to get a driver's license; I can't help my family pay the bills because I need a Social Security number to work; I can't join the army like the rest of my family because I need a Social Security number for that too, and I cannot apply for loans, federal government money, or scholarships because once more I need a Social Security number. I live day-by-day hoping a solution will be found, forever grateful to the kind people who continue to grace me with scholarships in order to continue my education (at a local community college).

I am in limbo. I tell my story repeatedly because it is the only thing that helps. 

Discussion Guide

Bringing together myriad voices and experiences provides Sh'ma readers with an opportunity in a few very full pages to explore a topic of Jewish interest from a variety of perspectives. To facilitate a fuller discussion of the ideas, we offer the following questions:

1. In discussing immigration reform, what factors should inform the communal positions of our faith communities?
2. What can we learn from immigration models in other countries?
3. Which key Jewish texts speak to issues of resettlement and welcoming the stranger?

Sarah Huacuja was born in 1988 in Veracruz, Mexico. After her mother died that same year, her grandparents cared for Sarah and her sister. In 2000, the family moved to Tucson, and she graduated with Honors from high school in May 2006. Although she was accepted to the University of Arizona, because of her immigration status, she was not granted financial assistance and was thus unable to attend the university.

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