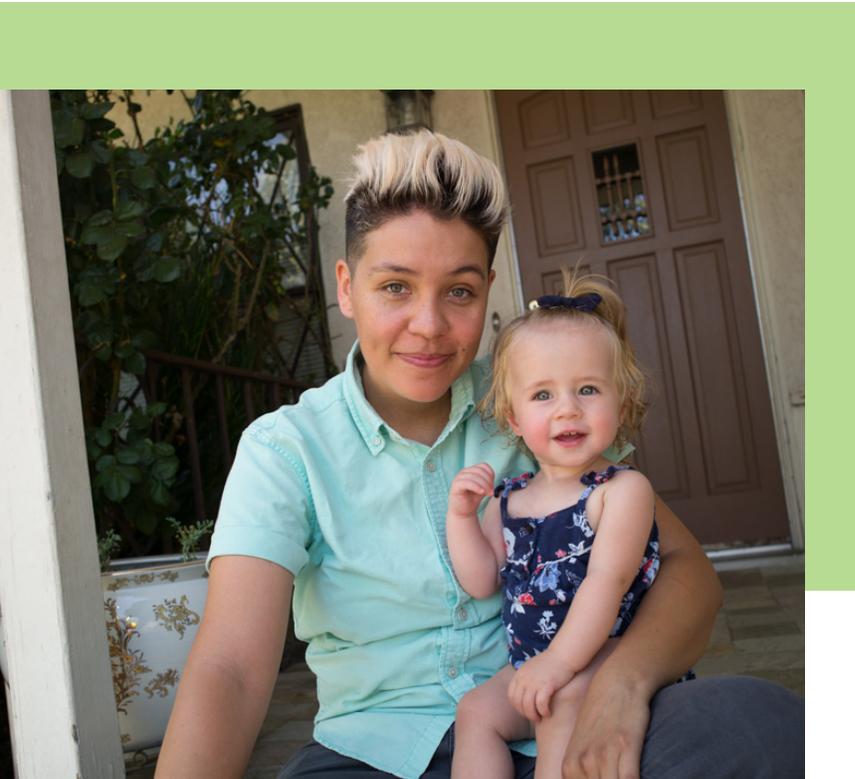


Juzlia



These days there is a false sense of patriotism and nationalism. 'This is mine and not yours, and you go over there, on this other side of this wall, and I'll stay here, and everything's gonna be better.' Have you thought about it? Is it really going to be better?

My name is Juzlia. I was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco. That's in Mexico. Shortly after I was born, my dad came to the United States to work. And when I was four, and my brother was two, we made the trip over to Los Angeles.

It took some adjustment, but everything still felt normal. I went to school as an American, but as soon as I entered home we were in Mexico. It's like I grew up in both places at the same time. But then I legally don't have the rights to either of them.

As a child, I remember always hearing things like "If you ever see a green-dressed police officer, *La Migra*, be careful." But I only realized this was a legal thing with Prop 187. I remember the school informing the parents, "If anyone comes, we'll protect the children. They don't have to give their names."

And so, yes, we always knew to just be careful with any legal paperwork, don't commit crimes, don't do anything that would get you in trouble. We had a script for certain situations. Like, I drove for a very long time without a driver's license. And if I was asked "whose car is this?" I was to say "My dad's. He doesn't have any knowledge that I took it." So, there were some things that we already knew what to do with.

Applying to a University was the first time I personally felt very disappointed with my situation. I got a scholarship to go to Chapman College, but because I didn't have any legal papers they said I would be charged a foreign exchange student fee. And there's no way we would've been able to afford anything like that.

I just remember it was the weirdest time for me because I had worked my entire life up to that point to be a college-educated person, because that's the reason my parents came to this country, and it was being denied to me. Everyone knew what I wanted to do and what kind of a student I was, and what my future held. It just felt like such a disappointment.

I did go to community college, but I dropped out to take a full-time job at a family-owned business. I've made a career out of it, and I'm doing really well. And, hey, I don't have any student loans to pay back. But, right now, I really dislike my employer.

The boss I had before, he saw what I brought to the table, and it didn't matter who I was. But the company we merged with is a faith-based company and the owner has his church mantras everywhere. So, that already made me uneasy because I am openly gay, and the judgment that has been passed on me has mostly come from religious persons. I felt like I was in the lion's den.

Surprisingly, even though my co-workers are religious, that's not the problem. The problem is the owner. He



"The watch is reminder that everything happens for a reason at the time it is meant to happen. Which includes my becoming legal now, because of my wife."



Inscribed with Juzlia's wedding date and the words "Forever starts today." Given to Juzlia by her wife, Brie.

won't even acknowledge that I'm there. He won't say "Good Morning," or "How are you doing?" But he'll pass by and say, "Hey Rich, how are you? I need your help. Can you come over here?" And any time that I've been absent, I come back and there's always changes. I'm not part of any of those conversations. It's like I'm invisible.

It's not easy for me to leave, given my legal status. I can't just get up and go. And I have recruiters calling me all day long. I have opportunities anywhere. But I have to be careful with what I say and what I do and make sure that I don't put myself in a situation where I can't provide for my family.

My wife and I have a daughter now, and we've talked about it - we have said that if anything ever happened and I was ever removed from this

country, we would just leave together as a family. We never thought that we would come to a place, politically, where we would have to think about that.

In all of the political rhetoric about illegal immigration, people sometimes forget that we're all human beings. And that the ultimate love, and protection, and unity that you feel for yourself and what's yours, that's what we need to apply on a grander scale to humanity.

I've paid taxes every year since I started working. I don't know anyone in my family who uses welfare or unemployment. I've never committed a crime, and I don't plan on doing so. I've never even had a speeding ticket. My ancestors are from this earth, from this piece of land that I'm standing on. This is my country, even though I am not a legal citizen.