

## My Impressions of Helping A Client With Her Asylum Application

I recently had the good fortune of being asked to work on a pro-bono case in our firm. Our job was to assist the client's aunt to be named as the client's guardian. I understood that this step was part of the lengthy asylum application process which our client was undergoing. An added twist was that the client and her aunt were primarily Spanish-speaking, so I was going to be able to put my Spanish-language abilities to very good use!

Before I met "E" and her aunt "F", I imagined I'd be meeting a nervous and possibly overwhelmed young woman (E was 17 at the time), along with a much older aunt. I was pleasantly surprised to see that E was outspoken, after getting over her initial shyness at meeting yet another lawyer, and F was not much older than E, and both were rather well-versed in the legal process.

I learned that by the age of 12, E was working the corn fields in her native Guatemala, as she was essentially the only income earner for her large family. E also faced daily threats to her life from the gangs that roamed the area. E and F sometimes spoke to each other in a Mayan dialect, and I realized that Spanish was their second language. Nevertheless, we were able to spend time discussing the guardianship process and obtaining the necessary information for the numerous documents to be filed with the court.

I was so impressed with E's maturity, fortitude and courage in the face of the almost insurmountable obstacles she had overcome in order to flee Guatemala and arrive in the United States. Further, in the short 18 months since her arrival, she managed to learn English well enough to attend a local high school, with instruction in English only, and obtain stellar grades in hard courses. I smiled when she told me she wanted to be a lawyer and help other asylum-seekers such as herself!

Happily, we were able to obtain the guardianship for F; I have remained in touch with E and F and hope E's asylum application is granted, as I have no doubts that E will become the successful attorney to which she aspires. ¡Si se puede!

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Recientemente, tuve la buena fortuna de haber trabajado en un caso gratuito en nuestra firma. El trabajo se trataba de obtener la tutela para la tía de nuestra cliente. Comprendí que este era solo un paso de tantos en el proceso de asilo de nuestra cliente. Además, me alegré al saber que la cliente y su tía hablaban español y que yo podría hablar con ellas en español.

Antes de conocer a "E" y su tía "F", me imaginé que iba a conocer una joven nerviosa y posiblemente abrumada (E tenía 17 años) con un tía mucho mayor que ella. Pero no fue así – E era muy habladora, después de sobrepasar su timidez al conocer otra

abogada, y F no era mucho más mayor que E, y las dos sabían más de lo esperado del proceso legal que las enfrentaba.

Aprendí que a partir de los 12 años de edad, E trabajó en la milpa en Guatemala, siendo la única que apoyaba la familia de forma económica. A diario, E era amenazada por las pandillas que terrorizaban el pueblo. A veces, E y F se hablaban entre ellas en su dialecto Maya, y me di cuenta que el español era su segundo idioma. A pesar de esto, pudimos pasar un buen rato hablando del proceso legal y preparando los documentos necesarios.

Quedé muy impresionada con la madurez de E, además de su fortaleza y valor, a pesar de los obstáculos casi insuperables que había enfrentado al huir de Guatemala y llegar a los EEUU. Sí eso no fuera poco, en los 18 meses desde su llegada en los EEUU, E aprendió inglés tan bien que pudo asistir al colegio con enseñanza solo en inglés y sacar muy buenas calificaciones. ¡Me alegré al saber que E quiere estudiar para ser abogada y ayudar a los que piden asilo, como ella!

Felizmente, pudimos obtener la tutela para F; me he mantenido en contacto con E y F y tengo esperanza que su solicitud de asilo se lo otorguen. No me cabe duda que E va a realizar su meta de convertirse en una abogada. ¡Si se puede!