

# **From Student to Citizen: A Modern Immigration story**

**Name: Emily Krikke**

**Course: History 339**

**Date of Interview: December 2, 2014**

**Date Written: December 7, 2014**

**Name of Interviewee: Leonardo Beiler (Leo Beiler)**

**Current Immigration Policy:**

The United States has many issues surrounding immigration. There has been a rise of illegal immigration in numbers unseen before which has caused much debate within congress and society regarding what actions should be taken. After the horrific events of September 11, 2001 the government and population have called for an increase in immigration laws and regulations. The issue of immigration and the problems of illegal immigration has been a much talked about topic but no answer has been received. The laws that are currently in place are out of date and need to be adjusted to fit the situations the nation is dealing with. Presently the laws of immigration can be broken down into easily understood groupings. The first is a family based immigration, this allows for family members of citizens to join their spouses, children, or parents in the United States. The next is employment based immigration, which offers both permanent and temporary visas to those coming to America for job related circumstances. Another law is for refugees and asylees, this permits those who are fear of persecution and unable to return to their home country because of war or corrupted government. The fourth law is the diversity visa program which enables individuals from countries with low immigration to the US rates ability to come to America in hopes of keeping the country well rounded and open to many. The final law qualifies for other forms of humanitarian relief which allows for people who do not meet the refugee status but still require assistance and safety that living in America offers. In order to become a full citizen an individual must possess a green card for at least 5 years while demonstrating good moral character as well as completing the proper English and US History examinations.

Many issues arise when discussing the terms that are stated above. Society argues over the qualifications of an individual in regards to the refugee or asylee status. The debate of who is

actually in need of protection over who just wants to escape a crumbling government and economy is present in the American society. Another conflict that arises, especially in terms of the illegal immigrants, is the family based immigration policies. If an illegal immigrant has a child while in America that child becomes an American citizen, it then becomes easier for the parents to be permitted into the country and given a green card. Many Americans fear that it is an easy way to cheat the system, while others fear for the safety of the children after their parents get deported. These are just some of the arguments that are mentioned within the population of the United States and in congress as well as both Republicans and Democrats debate about the topic.

Currently congress has attempted to update the immigration laws for the past six years but have never decided on a thing. President Obama has recently announced his plan to take the much debated issue into his own hands. He broadcasted his choice to administer an executive decision which would increase the patrol at the borders, to persecute felons not families, and increasing accountability with background checks and enforcing that taxes are being paid. The country needs a solution to the immigration problems that currently plague the country, whether it is by a law passed by congress or an executive decision being enforced. The only way to fix the conflicts is with action, which has unfortunately been neglected thus far. <sup>1</sup>

## **Interview**

In order to better address the current immigration process, I conducted an oral interview with a friend of mine named Leo Beiler. On December 2, 2014 I travelled to Houghton, MI from Marquette, MI to visit Leo where he lives with his wife and daughter. After his wife graciously served dinner Leo and I went into the study and begun the official interview process. We talked

---

<sup>1</sup> American Immigration Council. "Basics of the United States Immigration System." *Immigration Policy Center* (March 1, 2014).

for about forty two minutes discussing many topics about his experience. Leo had a different immigration story than most. He came to America originally with no intention of staying. He participated in what was to be a six month study abroad program in order to improve his education and increase his world view. While in America, completing his senior year of High School, Leo met his now wife Hannah. The two immediately fell in love and decided to get married, having a baby girl soon after. He was not planning on staying in the United States but after finding love and starting a family decided to partake in the long process of becoming a citizen.

During our interview we discussed what his life was like in Brazil. Leo told me about his prior schooling while in Brazil and what growing up was like there. He was born into a well off family he had maids and gardeners at his house at all times. He was fortunate that his family could afford to send him to an American school as well. There he learned subjects both in English and Portuguese which gave him an unusual head start once in the United States. Among his early experiences in Brazil we discussed what it was like living in America.

Leo described his lack of communication he has been able to keep with his family. He only gets to talk to them once a week and has only been able to see them face to face on rare occasions. Leo wishes that he had the ability to see them or talk to them more regularly but the expense and difficulty of receiving a visa is too great. Another issue that is brought up during the interview was the difficulty he experienced when trying to get a green card. Despite being married to an American citizen and having a child who is an American citizen, the process was confusing and problematic. It wasn't until he acquired a lawyer to assist him with the process that his qualms were lessened. He describes the unfortunate situations in which individuals have too hard of a time getting into the country, even just to visit, or receiving a green card (like

himself) when their reasons are legitimate. He correlates this hardship to the growing concern of illegal immigration, stating that the government does not see the difference in immigrants anymore.

## **Conclusion**

The interview that was conducted allows for the public to evaluate the immigration process as it currently stands. It permits those interested a modern approach from a first-hand view of the experience. By examining a contemporary immigration story, society can learn about the true conflicts that effect immigration into the United States. This interview has the ability to act as a primary source by addressing the hardships that an immigrant must work through in order to gain citizenship into America. Within its contents Leo discusses what live for an immigrant is like in the United States.

Previously in history the consideration of prejudice and discrimination was at the forefront of conversation regarding immigration. Racial perceptions were an issue that many faced upon arriving in the country and throughout their acclimation into society. The issues of the past no longer seem to be the greatest obstacle immigrants face, instead the legality and government regulations have become barriers that are difficult to overcome. Leo describes it as unnecessarily complicated and unfairly geared toward those who are attempting living in America illegally. The consequences of which those trying to complete the process the correct way are punished for. This interview gives society the reality of immigrating to America and brings to light matters that are not commonly thought about. By using Leo's story along with others who have recently immigrated, society can see the true aspects of the immigration laws and hopefully use the knowledge to create an immigration reform that will address the complications that are experienced.