

Why We Must Dismantle Unjust Institutions, Not Reform Them

as part of the Stories Connect, Immigration Series

Conversation between Jose Juan and Berenice Federico Moreno.

Recorded on June 13, 2016 in Spanish and translated by Maria Moreno, their eldest child.

Berenice

Tell me a bit about when you were little.

Jose Juan

When I was little, I had a nice childhood in Mexico in my town, but at the same time it was very sad because my dad left us when I was 3 years old. That was a big struggle for my mother to give us shelter. We were 5 children in total and for me being the youngest it made me really sad seeing my mom struggle and I felt bad because I couldn't do anything about it.

Berenice

So at what age did you stop going to school? You had mentioned that you stopped going to school.

Jose Juan

Yes, I stopped. In fact, I stopped going to school when I ended middle school. I wanted to study, my sister told me that she would pay the schooling for me but seeing my mom, we have a good economic posture. We had a place to live, we have a house with good conditions, we had very little to survive. I started work but not all people hired me because of the fact that I was very little, I would work some days and others I wouldn't. Because not all people hired me.

Berenice

And what would you do when you weren't working?

Jose Juan

I would be at home with my younger sister. Well, she was one year older than me. Both of us would stay home. My other sisters went to

school. My older sister went to school and worked. She would help my mom the most.

Berenice

What did you do with the money you earned?

Jose Juan

I gave the money to my mom because I saw the little that she earned and to see if that would help her afford food for us. What about your childhood?

Berenice

Well it's almost the same. It was sad because my dad left us when I was 3 years old, they got separated. It was very painful, I may have been 3 years old but I still remember. After that discussion happened we moved to my grandma's house and we lived there for several years. Some years passed and my mom started going to work in Guadalajara so she would be able to support me and my brothers and that lasted about 2 or 3 years. My mom then had the opportunity to come to the U.S. and she went to Chicago. Some more time passed and we helped my grandma with the chores around the house; she would always struggle with us to send us to school.

Jose Juan

Did you like school that much?

Berenice

I never liked school.

Jose Juan

I didn't like it either.

Berenice

I never liked school but I had to go. When I was like 9 or 10 years old my grandma had a heart attack. I slept next to her and I will never forget that day. I remember she told me she could not breathe and then she sat on the bed. I felt how desperate she was. All of us immediately woke up and took her to the closest hospital but on our way there her heart stopped beating, she had a heart attack. It was a very sad night. I felt it was something really ugly because she was like a second mom to me and my brother's while my mom went out to work

to different places. My grandma and grandpa would always take care of us.

Jose Juan

Did your mom go see your grandma?

Berenice

Yes but at that time my mom was already in Chicago, she had been living in Chicago for about a year and a half and she went back to Mexico for my grandmas funeral and she only lasted about a month there and brought my sister with her back to Chicago. Some months passed and my mom sent someone to take my brother to Chicago. Since my grandma was not around anymore she was missed by many and I had to move in with an aunt and lived with her for 3 years until one day my mom called me and said that I was going to Chicago, I was the only one missing. I told her no I won't go because I was very happy playing with all my cousins. It mattered to me that it was a very humble childhood because I was very happy. It was a very nice childhood but very sad at the same time. If I would have the opportunity to live the same childhood again I would. I helped my grandpa a lot since my grandma was not around anymore to make him his coffee in the mornings and give him his dinner at night. I helped them a lot. Sometimes I missed school because I would always be worried that my grandpa and uncle wouldn't have anything to eat when they got home from work.

Jose Juan

Did they ask you why you didn't go to school?

Berenice

Yes but my aunt already knew how since I was little. My aunt always told me that when I am older I would become a very responsible woman because since I was little I would always help my grandma in the kitchen. But you know stuff happens.

Jose Juan

Yea, lots of sad moments.

Berenice

So why did you decide to come to the United States?

Jose Juan

I decided to come here because I wanted to help my mom more. People that come hear think that they are going to win lots of money and become citizens to help their family members. My situation was made because there weren't a lot of resources and...

Berenice

You wanted to help her and try to keep going ahead with her so she wouldn't struggle anymore?

Jose Juan

Yes! My older sister helped my mom a little more, but I wanted to help her finish building her house. I had the opportunity to come to the United States because of one of my uncles. At first he wanted to take me with him but I kept insisting until he made up his mind and took me with him. I struggled to come to the United States because the first time I tried to cross the border I ended up being caught and the police sent me to Matamoros for some days. About 2 or 3 months later I tried crossing again and I made it. At that time, I lived in Woodridge with my uncle.

Berenice

How long did you live there?

Jose Juan

Ah, I lived with my uncle for about 3 or 4 years.

Berenice

Are you ok?

Jose Juan

What did you do when you came to the United States? How did you come?

Berenice

How did I come? Well, they took me to Sanluis and from there we took an air plane. I don't remember exactly how the experience was but I came in an air plane. I just remember that we landed at O'Hare at 3:00 in the morning. I imagined Chicago differently before coming to O'Hare. Chicago is really nice but I imaged it differently because of how my brother and sister made me imagine it. Coming to Chicago made me really happy because I was able to see my mom and sister after 4 years and my brother after 2 years.

Jose Juan
What did you feel when you came here?

Berenice
I felt weird, sometimes even uncomfortable when I was around my family. I had to be uncomfortable, but it was just weird for me.

Jose Juan
Did you miss cactus? (Laughs)

Berenice
Yes I did miss them (laughs). There is some hear to. Months past and I was coping with everything and know I didn't want to leave.

Jose Juan
Me neither.

Bernice
Some more time passed and then I met you.

Jose Juan
Yes, when you met me, I had been living in the United States for about 1 year and a half, well almost 2 years. When WE met, not when you met me.

Berenice
Do you remember that day?

Jose Juan
Yes how could I not remember?

Berenice
You were the one who started it, not me.

Jose Juan
But that was really beautiful. Now that I've met you we have accomplished lots of things together.

Berenice
All that we have lived together since then.

Jose Juan
Good and bad, but at the end together.

Berenice

It was very hard because we were very young but as time goes by, we
have both matured more.

Jose Juan

Yes we are almost the same age.

Berenice

Yea, but thanks to us being together really young we now have Maria
who is our first daughter, she is really big now.

Jose Juan

When they first told you that you were pregnant, we were really happy
and with the illusion that we were going to be young parents. It was
happiness but then a tragedy happened in the first month and a half of
your pregnancy. My sisters called me to say that my mom had died.

Berenice

That day was really hard because neither of us expected that. A day
before she died I talked to her and she was so excited and told me she
was very happy because you had already told her I was pregnant.

Jose Juan

Yes I do remember that. I promised my mom that if the baby was a girl
she would have the same name as her. We didn't know if it was going
to be a girl or a boy yet. After that there has been a lot of (both)
sadness and happiness.

Berenice

And because of that you had to leave to Mexico.

Jose Juan

Yea but I was gone for only a month, but I am still here and I don't
want to go.

Berenice

But when you came back how did you find me?

Jose Juan

You were really skinny.

Berenice
My belly was barely starting to notice.

Jose Juan
Why were you so skinny?

Berenice
I had always been like that but when I was 8 months pregnant...

Jose Juan
Yea, it looked like you were about to explode right?

Berenice
My stomach got really big from Maria. Yea but time goes by fast.
Thanks to God there were no complications. When the hour came it
wasn't like any other day because it was our first daughter and it was
very special for my mom because it was going to be her first
granddaughter and we didn't know if it was going to be a girl or a boy.
We were anxious to know.

Jose Juan
I was really nervous. I didn't know if I should stay with her or go to the
waiting room.

Berenice
You were scared.

Jose Juan
Yea, I was nervous. I didn't know what to do, stay or leave.

Berenice
But after all I suffered at labor what did you feel when you had Maria
in your arms?

Jose Juan
It feels really exciting holding your baby because a baby is a part of
your body and soul. I felt really happy being a father for the first time.

Berenice
It was even more special for you because almost all men want a boy to
be the first child but you had the vision of having a girl; you wanted a
girl.

Jose Juan

I wanted a girl because of my mom; I promised her that if I had a girl she would have her name. I had the miracle or the luck to have a girl.

Berenice

Yea, and she grew up fast.

Jose Juan

Yea, way too fast and then Hector...

Berenice

When I was 6 months pregnant from Hector, Maria started to get jealous.

Jose Juan

Yea, then Nathan comes.

Berenice

One more happiness.

Jose Juan

Yea but then the mistakes come. When the police pulled me over.

Berenice

The DUI...

Jose Juan

Yea, the DUI. When you were calling me to see when was I going to be home and I was like I'll be home soon.

Berenice

I was worried that night because I knew what time you got home and you had to be home by that time, your job was close to where we lived so I didn't know what was happening. I was waiting for you so we could eat dinner and then I decided to call you and you told me that you would be home in 15 minutes. The 15 minutes passed and you still weren't home. I was like I don't know what happened to this man. At 12:30 (a.m.) I received a call from the police station so that I could go and pick you up. That is where everything started. It was a very long and difficult process.

Jose Juan

True. I was struggling with the thing. When I finished (the penalty for the DUI) they transferred me to immigration.

Berenice
Yea, six months with immigration.

Jose Juan
But now seven years of struggling.

Berenice
Seven years struggling now and lots of stress and worrying in each court and check in with immigration. Asking God that you not be sent to Mexico, saying that anything could happen. These seven years have been really hard.

Jose Juan
Yes, really hard but trying to do as much as possible to not be separated.

Berenice
I feel that all this seven years of struggle has been a lesson. It serves as an experience for you and me because we matured together. We have had lots of ups and downs but still we have survived together despite everything.

Jose Juan
Yes, but I think the biggest decision is when immigration asks you to have an air plane ticket, I don't know if I should stay or go back to the land that saw me grow up.

Berenice
When they told you that you had to take the...

Jose Juan
Airplane ticket...

Berenice
The 15th...

Jose Juan
I was thinking if I should go or stay until they find me again, but you are really active and immediately went with the group...

Berenice
...SSIP. I did it mostly because we needed to find a solution and because if we want something we need to fight for it and we are not alone we are a family of 7. You know that you are a big support in the

house and you have always supported me as I have supported you. It's not that I want to pay you for all the time you have supported me; it's that we have to support one another. We have 5 children and we have to keep taking them ahead. That day you got out of court they had told you that you had to bring an airplane ticket because you were leaving the 15th. Can you imagine what it felt like? Even though you have your attitude you have always been a good husband and responsible father. I know we have had our differences over the years but I am still here and I would never leave you because I know how difficult this is and I have always supported you. This is mostly the feeling you get when your husband is telling you that he doesn't know when we will see each other again as husband and wife or as a family. You get a really ugly feeling that makes your stomach shrink and you get a knot on your throat but at the same time you are angry and you want to cry until you run out of tears.

Jose Juan

The despair of what immigration wants to do with us, they want to separate our family because of a mistake that I already paid for.

Berenice

I know you did and I am conscious of it.

Jose Juan

You feel rage and sadness at the same time. It is not for us to decide if we are going to make a mistake today or tomorrow.

Berenice

Because of a DUI they want to separate you from our side. Immigration doesn't care if we have a family and definitely don't care if we have feelings. They only care about you making a mistake and getting a DUI and because of that you have to be deported.

Jose Juan

Until we came to this option.

Berenice

The option of Sanctuary.

Jose Juan

An even more difficult situation where I had to ask myself what should I do.

Berenice
Should I go or leave.

Jose Juan
Should I leave or stay in sanctuary. We had the option of sanctuary
because of OCAD.

Berenice
And CRLI gave us the option (also). When they proposed that option I
was like surprised because we didn't expect any of this. I didn't even
know what Sanctuary was and I know you didn't either because when I
saw your face you were like what is Sanctuary.

Jose Juan
Yea, what is Sanctuary? I wanted to look and investigate what it was.

Berenice
When they told you what it was you said "I'm not going to be looked
up." I asked myself he is not going to be looked up in jail because as
they had explained to us, we could visit you as much as we wanted
during the week and we could even stay with you to sleep. During the
week we mainly looked at the rules the church has.

Jose Juan
But after the decision was made it was difficult to decide. I would
always ask you should I stay or leave. You would always tell me that if
I stay I would be able to keep fighting my case and you would be able
to see me. People from the organization told us that I would be safe
and I would be able to see my family. All of that seemed untrue to me
and I thought it was easier for me to leave and then come back but
then you don't know what can happen to you on your way back. You
don't know if you will be able to see your family again. There were
nights that I would not sleep because I was worried of what might
happen and it was the same thoughts when I went to work. I would
count the days and that would worry me even more because each day
was closer to the day I was supposed to leave.

Berenice
I remember you would tell me that you were very worried and when
you came home from work you were very stressed out.

Jose Juan

On the day of my birthday I was still asking myself should I leave or should I stay.

Berenice

You didn't even know if we should go celebrate your birthday or buy suitcases because we didn't know what was going to happen. It didn't even feel like it was your birthday because you were just thinking "what I should do?" I remember I told you that for me it was a better idea to take Sanctuary because you would keep fighting your case and if you leave you wouldn't know if you could've won your case. I mostly tried to convince you because of the kids, you know that they have had a rough time too and well they are kids and they don't understand that much. Our three oldest children know what is happening but our two youngest don't.

Jose Juan

I appreciate the support that you have given me and I wanted to let you know that because of you I decided to take Sanctuary and because of you I don't feel as ~~dearest~~ as the first day I came into Sanctuary. I know I am not alone because you are constantly coming and bringing the children to see me. Arlin has basically taken Sanctuary with me because she doesn't want to go home with you. Thank you for everything you do for me and I thank the church for giving us the opportunity to keep fighting our case and thanks to all the people that support us without even knowing who we are.

Berenice

Did you expect all the support the people are giving us?

Jose Juan

No I didn't imagine that. I didn't know what all this was. I didn't know there were more good people than bad, well not bad just a little ignorant.

Berenice

Yes the situation was difficult for both of us, but I mostly left it up to you because were the one going into Sanctuary.

Jose Juan

I know when I go in but I don't know when I will get out.

Berenice

It has been two months that you haven't been at home with us; I see the Sanctuary as a second home because I've been coming really often and spent most of my time here.

Jose Juan

But it is also sad because I can't be at home and enjoy being outside with the kids, I can't do things I use to do with the kids and instead I am here worrying that if I leave the police might get me; I can't be with you enjoying our kids. The sad part is that I couldn't be with you or our daughter for her confirmation but I admire you because besides all that is happening you are always trying to look at the bright side of something bad and you are always cheering me up by saying everything will be better and everything will be normal again.

Berenice

Well what can I say; I will always be supporting you in the bad and good times. Anyways, it is hard you know that I am not as strong as you say I am.

Jose Juan

But the fact of seeing you here with the kids and you going back to take them to school, doing the chores around the house and cooking, all of that is something I appreciate and give you thanks for everything you do for me, and the waiting for immigration to take the discretion to stop my deportation. I hope that everything is solved and we will be back together like the family we are.

Berenice

You have nothing to thank me for because you know I will always be with you till my last day, I would never have the heart to leave you in this situation and we have 5 kids we have to take ahead and that is something really hard. You know that we need you in the house, that you are missed by many. We miss those times we would remember old times and laugh or just play around with family members. I know that everything will be alright and all this will be over because I have hope.

Jose Juan

I hope, I hope, it will be like a dream. I hope that immigration is not that cruel with us and will take the discretion to stop my deportation with the help of the people that support me.

Berenice

That is what we are fighting for with our lawyer. You know that immigration just looks at us as numbers not human beings.

Jose Juan

Yes but...

Berenice

Don't lose hope everything will be alright. We don't know how much more time it's going to be but as long as we are together and the church is with us we will be alright and we will get through this. Have you imagined the day you come out of Sanctuary? I have and I hope that day comes soon, the kids are anxious too. I hope that something good comes out of this because this is a big sacrifice.

Jose Juan

What would you do the day I would be free to go home and they would say we are not going to deport you?

Berenice

For them to stop your deportation is sufficient. That would be great news for the kids and the fact that you are coming home with us.

Jose Juan

Yea, great news. The kids are on vacation and I am here. That makes me worried; a lot of things come to mind like what I could do or what am I going to do most of all with the kids. I would be able to go out and play with them and also thank all the people that support us because this still doesn't end.

Berenice

I hope we all see this as one more experience. Being in a deportation process is not easy. It makes you think about the people that truly appreciate you. Give thanks to all the people that support us because I really didn't expect this much support but thanks to God we have lots of support.

Jose Juan

Yes thanks to all the people that are supporting us in this moment.

Berenice

We have lots of support from different churches, group members, and students. We learn something new every day and I think that makes you grow more as a better person.

Jose Juan

Yes and to keep fighting for what we want

Berenice

To learn to appreciate what you have; this helps us learn more every day. The kids are going to be much happier when you are home.

Jose Juan

We will all be happy together. I will be happy to be home with you and the kids.

Berenice

I hope it will be all good soon.