

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Thank you for your financial support during the Summer of 2013. With your assistance, I was able to commit my summer to Catholic Migration Service to provide high quality immigration representation to immigrants from all walks of life. One experience really comes to mind when I think about the work I did this summer.

My clients were a couple from Trinidad who were deaf and worked with a sign language interpreter who had recently been in car accident and then a stroke. Being both able bodied, and fully functioning, I was terrified that I would do, or say something insensitive or unkind. I didn't know if my normal friendliness and humor would carry me through the appointment.

I gathered my nerve and met my clients in the receptionist's office. The moment I entered the room, they all cheered like a celebrity had just arrived; everyone wanted to hug me or to shake my hand. I was suddenly overwhelmed by their kindness, and masked it with a shy smile. I walked them to my office and explained the process: how the appointment might go, how long it might take, and what we would likely accomplish. Each word exited my mouth, and filtered through the interpreter's fingers. Then we began.

We clarified general background information, made sure our information was accurate, filled in some missing information and then began filling out forms. I-485, I-765, I-864, each document for a different purpose, but throughout the drudgery the two were happy and smiling, you would never know that they had been waiting almost thirteen years to get to this step, and for that time, they had been left in a strange limbo, undocumented, but, in the system.

Half way through the meeting we were joking and laughing, I had long adjusted to the delayed communication, and no one felt rushed or misunderstood. When it was over, and the papers were coming together, they shook my hand, gave me a kiss and hugged me, again. I had been so kind, efficient, and thorough, they said. They appreciated all my help, they told me. I replied once more with my shy smile. I didn't feel like I had done much.

As my motley crew left my office, I was moved, almost to tears by the bittersweet reality. For thirteen years, two people lived out loud; married, had children, made friends, lived and loved together despite their immigration status. My clients reminded me of a very important lesson; joy is a constant choice. Whether life provides opportunities for happiness or sadness; joy can remain.

The work I do surprises me often, but not as much as it did that Thursday afternoon. Even if things don't work out the way I hope in NY, I have learned, and grown, and experiences like this are the ones I hope to carry with me as long as I can remember.

Chinwe Ohanele