

7.2 Ways to Make Immigration About People, Not Status with A...

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SPEAKERS

Jasmine Bradshaw, Ana Wacker

J Jasmine Bradshaw 00:00
You're listening to the First Name Basis Podcast, Season Seven, Episode Two, "Ways to Make Immigration About People, Not Status" with Ana Wacker.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 00:16
Teaching our children to be inclusive and anti-racist starts with us within the sacred walls of our home. First Name Basis is designed to empower you with the confidence you need to be a leader in your family and a change maker in your community. Together we will wrestle with hard questions and use the answers to create the world we want — a world that reflects our values of inclusion, compassion, and courage. I'm your host, Jasmine Bradshaw, and I am so excited to be on this journey with you.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 00:53
Hello, First Name Basis Fam. I am so glad you are here. You are in for a really, really interesting and wise and passionate interview. Today, I was able to interview one of my longtime friends. Her name is Ana Wacker. We actually met when we were both interning in New York City at the Teach For America national office. So as many of you know, I used to be a teacher before I was a mom and a podcaster and an anti-racist educator. And my journey started with Teach for America. And before that I was an intern there, because I was like the literal poster child for TFA. There is a poster, a Teach for America poster, with my face on it. I was really, really into the organization. I, you know, have some different thoughts about it now. But I definitely was all-in. When I was a junior in college, I got an internship to fly to New York for the entire summer, live there, and work at Teach for America's national office. And it was totally a dream come true. Ana and I met because we were both interning together, and we were also in this program called Sponsors for Educational Opportunity, or SEO. SEO is this amazing program for college students who are people of color, and it was mostly for business students, like students

who wanted to go into finance, investment banking, accounting, all of those things. But they also had a nonprofit internship opportunity. And so when I found it, I remember looking online and finding it, like oh my gosh, this is my lightning bolt moment. It was so cool. And so I applied to SEO, got in, found out that I was matched with Teach for America, which was you know, the dream at the time, and I met Ana. So together, Ana and I, along with a gaggle of other SEO interns were adventuring through New York City. And it was so much fun. It was one of my most favorite memories of my entire life, this huge adventure in New York. It was such a huge change for both of us because I was coming from Phoenix, Arizona, and Ana was coming from Corpus Christi, Texas. So we were both like these little wide-eyed college interns really just trying to figure it out together, and it was a blast. So I wanted to have Ana on First Name Basis, because I know her on a first-name basis "we're actual real-life friends" but also because she has such a powerful story of hope and of healing. And she has been through the immigration process, through the citizenship process here in the United States.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 03:42

So Ana was born in Mexico and her family came to United States when she was four. And I'll let her tell you the entirety of the story. Well I'm sure it's not "if it was the entirety of the story, we'd be here for like three days. But I will let her tell you some of the main points of her story, because it is really, really powerful to hear what her family went through in order to become citizens of the United States, and how she has moved forward and healing from that process and the wisdom that she has, for all of us and for her past little girl Ana-self. So I'm so excited to be able to share this dear friend with you. And I hope you heard from the title that one of the biggest things I was able to learn from Ana during this process was that we really need to get on a first-name basis with one another. And we need to make immigration about people and about their stories, and not necessarily about status. And even though that might seem obvious, I'm just really, really glad that she pointed it out to me so that I could have it in the front of my mind and in the front of my heart as I'm thinking about these policies and what we want to see changed.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 04:55

So it's been about a decade since Ana and I were traveling through New York together. And now she lives in Boston, her and her husband and her little girl live in Boston. And she works as a data analyst. And she is just a powerhouse. And one of the other things that stuck out to me as she was sharing was the importance of community. And I felt like it was this theme that we have going this season already, because last week, I made a whole episode about community. It was called, "You're Not Meant to Do This Alone: The Power of Positive Community." So if you haven't listened to that, definitely go back and listen to Episode One from Season Seven.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 05:35

But also, I wanted to tell you that we made a free download to go along with that episode. So in the episode, I shared the six characteristics of positive community. And I just wanted to make a little PDF that you could either have on your computer, you could screenshot it on your phone, or you could even like print it out and put it on your fridge, just so that you have it in a visible place where you're like, "This is what I'm working towards. This is the kind of community that I

want to be a part of." So as Ana was talking about the importance of community and how immigration is so intertwined with our communities, and how families who are going through the immigration process are really depending on the community around them to help buoy them up through such an arduous situation. I was like, "Oh, my goodness, this would be a good thing for us to all have handy." So if you're interested in getting that free download, just go to firstnamebasis.org/positivecommunity. I will make sure to put the link in the show notes.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 06:41

But I also wanted to tell you if you are already on our Fam Favorites email list "that is the email that goes out every single Saturday. We share about the episode, we give a deeper look into the different materials that I use to create these episodes, the resources and the podcasts, the articles, all the things that I use. And we share some throwbacks to other anti-racist tips that you might want to have in your back pocket. You will already receive this free download in Fam Favorites. So if you're on Fam Favorites, don't worry, it's already headed to your inbox on Saturday. But if you're not there yet, just go to firstnamebasis.org/positivecommunity and the download will come right to your inbox. And then you'll be added to Fam Favorites so that you can get future downloads, anything else that we send out will be also sent to your inbox so you don't have to worry about signing up multiple times. So firstnamebasis.org/positivecommunity, and I will leave that link in the show notes.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 07:40

And the last thing I have to tell you before we start is that we are opening the doors to Ally Elementary and Ally Elementary Jr. on September 20th! Whoo hoo! I'm super excited. And if you're not sure, those are our two educational programs for families and for classrooms, about how to create the anti-racist allies that our communities so desperately need. So Ally Elementary Jr. is for preschool through second graders. And Ally Elementary is for third through eighth graders. So we really have you covered in all of those situations. Just go to firstnamebasis.org/allyelementary, and you can learn more. You can sign up for the waitlist, we'll send out a coupon code, it will be fantastic. All right. Enough waiting. Enough waiting. I want you to hear from Ana and how wonderfully wonderfully wise she is.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 08:30

Ana! Oh my gosh, I'm so excited that you're here. It's been so long. I'm so grateful to have you on the podcast.

A Ana Wacker 08:37

Yeah, I'm excited to be here. And I'm excited for this conversation.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 08:42

Yeah, yeah. So tell us a little bit about yourself. Like how do you identify and what does your life look like right now?

me look like right now?

A

Ana Wacker 08:51

Right now, it's a little bit of joyful chaos. But I'm all in good ways. So I identify as a first generation immigrant. I moved to the US at four years old, and I'm the youngest of four. So it's been quite an experience in general, but I think right now I'm sort of in a great healing process with it all. And as a parent, I have a young daughter, so watching her sort of get to the age that I was when we immigrated is all sorts of powerful and insightful and therapeutic and healing. So right now lots of chaos because she is a toddler, but also lots of joy to kind of heal and repair a lot of those childhood parts.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 09:36

So yeah, wow, I can imagine that you're holding so many feelings at the same time. Well, tell us a little bit about your upbringing. Like where did you grow up? And what is like, what was your relationship to the immigration system here in the United States?

A

Ana Wacker 09:55

Yeah, it's, um, it was complicated. That would have been my Facebook status if I had one in the immigration system. You know, I grew up in Corpus Christi, Texas. So it's a coastal town about 150 miles north of the border, the US-Mexico border. And I think for my first few years in the States, I didn't quite realize what was going on. I sort of just knew this wasn't where I was born. But I had pretty great memories and good upbringing, I was fortunate to go to really great schools and kind of have good experiences, and education, which was a lot of a huge blessing. But I did sort of, at a younger age, start to recognize a lot of adult topics that were being discussed around me and a lot of just harder subjects that I don't think I was quite prepared for. And so that definitely brought to light, just more intensity, I think, in my life. And so when I really understood the weight of immigration, the weight of having to figure out your process to a documented status to residency to citizenship, that weight really landed on me when I was 14. I was getting ready to go to high school and all the regular kids, all the cool kids, are going to the neighborhood schools. But my district had just started an early college high school at that time, and this was post-9/11, which really changed the immigration system significantly. So at the time, my parents were sort of unsure how college was going to look, unsure how my funding was going to look. And they really strongly encouraged "they'll claim to this day that it was my choice" but they strongly encouraged that I go to this early college high school and at least obtain some form of college education. You know, when I was 14, I wanted to have fun, I wanted to be with my friends, I wanted to play soccer for the high school. I wanted to go to pep rallies. And yeah, and it was, you know, now not quite as big of a decision now that I'm a parent and big decisions happen all the time. But at that point, that weight, I think was when I first realized, you know, this is serious, and there are things that I'm gonna have to keep doing differently until my journey to be accepted in this country kind of resolves itself.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 12:16

Yeah, I'm imagining the pushback that maybe you gave to your parents, and now, kind of

reflecting back on why they were so adamant about it.

A

Ana Wacker 12:27

Yeah, yeah, there was definitely I think one of the things that is really hard, I imagine as a parent, both an immigrant yourself and caring for immigrant children, is that there is a lot less room for choice and novelty of childhood when you're really having to balance making almost strategic decisions at such a young age so that you can really have the best outcome for your children. And so there was a lot of pushback, I think, to this day, my mom and I are still healing a lot from just the level of intensity she kind of had to have for us so that we could be safe, make smart decisions, even when we didn't fully understand. And it was definitely hard. I am forever grateful for the level of guidance that they provided for me and the level of opportunity seeking, specifically that my mom did. She's a fierce woman. And I have so many memories of her fighting for so many opportunities for her children, that to this day, I don't even know where she found the courage and conviction to do it. And in another language that wasn't her own, with people that didn't fully understand what she was trying to say, and with so much passion to just really get what was best for her kids.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 13:52

Yeah. And that really makes me wonder about the support that you had during your childhood. Like, what kind of support do you feel like was helpful? Or is there any support that you wish you had more of from your community? Whether it be mentors or teachers? Obviously, you had a lot of support from your family.

A

Ana Wacker 14:12

Yeah, I mean, so much support I, I don't know if it was the grace of God or the luck of the universe or what higher power was watching out for me and my family. But I think one thing that is often underrepresented or unappreciated about immigration is that it really is a community effort oftentimes, like an immigrant family doesn't solely make it off of their own selves. They require community support, and people to really reach out and extend a helping hand. And so for my family, my parents actually still live in the hometown that I was raised in and I try to get them to leave all the time because I want them by me, but I'm seeing them sort of live in this community that really nurtured us so much growing up. So a ton of great examples really start with the educators in my life, I have so much respect for public education, teachers, counselors, principals, and individuals that really spend the time and the days guiding and mentoring our children. Because, as a kid, I don't think I would have known who to turn to, if I hadn't had great mentors and teachers in the school system, specifically in high school, which is wild in and of itself. But you know, I was in high school, certainly where at first I didn't really want to be. And then going through all these changes during my high school years was really when we were starting to understand what a path to residency, what citizenship, would look like for me, and what that required. And so I remember, I didn't really tell many of my friends my story in those years, so I sort of was having one persona publicly, and then hiding a large part of my story. And that's really unsettling, I think, for any person, in any type of story. And a lot of my teachers created so much space for me to process sort of privately, but also very gracefully with a lot of care. I remember, one teacher specifically, I don't know what news

we had gotten that day, but I showed up to class and I couldn't lift my face, because there were just tears coming down. And without even thinking, I don't even know if she had the authority to do this, she just kicked everyone out of the classroom and said, you know, "Go get a snack, figure something out, come back in five minutes. Ana needs a minute; we're gonna figure this out." And that level of care, I think, really made me feel safe in a time in my life that safety was not always guaranteed. So I think teachers are amazing.

A

Ana Wacker 17:01

And then a lot of community members. One of the things I will always credit my mum for is her amazing ability to create friendships and relationships with people and have those humans pour into our lives. So we had a lot of family friends that my parents made that became surrogate aunts and uncles, became surrogate grandparents and, and would help us have normal experiences. Some of my parents' friends, you know, helped my sister get a prom dress when she was ready to go to prom, which is something that my parents couldn't afford at the time. A lot of them helped us figure out our first cars and how we were going to be able to drive and obtain you know, a car to at a price that didn't require a loan. So all of those things, I think it's a testament of people's willingness and love to help someone in need that sometimes gets missed. And I like to remember often, because especially in the world that we're in today, I think more and more people help an immigrant than they might know. And even with their views being potentially not as favorable for immigration. There's still some kindness and joy and love in their heart to serve someone in need, that they might not even know that they're helping someone else figure out their immigration status. So I like to have those moments and kind of ponder on those, because they remind me of the goodness of humans and the goodness of people.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 18:33

Yeah, and that story about your teacher, like completely gave me goosebumps. And it made me wonder, How did you know who to trust with your story? Like, how could you tell?

A

Ana Wacker 18:47

Yeah, that's a great, a great question. I go back and forth on this even for myself, because as we all do in high school, I had my, well...we might not all do this. But in high school, I had my first, my first boyfriend. So I dated for the first time while I was in high school. And he was a sweet, sweet human. But I did remember, sort of, this immigration story might complicate this. It complicates this relationship, it might bring too much weight, it might be too heavy. So I really literally never revealed part of this to my boyfriend at the time. And as I grew older, and finally went to college and had different relationships, I sort of stopped, sat in wondering like, how interesting it was to, you know, fall in love to some degree. It's what we can in high school, to fall in love with someone and have them care for you so deeply, and not even be able to be your full self. And so as I think about the people that I was able to trust and depend on, a lot of what it came down to is, were they also willing to be vulnerable with me. Were they showing me moments where it showed that we were both in this human experience together. And though my story might be heavy, it might be different, it was also another story. And they had a story too. And so that particular teacher was a teacher that was very vulnerable with us as

students, was very raw and real. And so when it came to trusting her with that moment, it felt so natural, because I had known her as a human being, and had been able to really rest in knowing that my vulnerability was going to be cared for with intention.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 20:39

Yeah, yeah, I really like how you bring it back to a more in a more general sense, connecting our stories to one another in this vulnerable way. And so much of what you said has definitely connected with me and my story, I'm just thinking about how hard I've been on my parents lately for how hard they were on us. And, like, how much I understand that it was a means of survival. But I'm exhausted still.

A Ana Wacker 21:11

Yeah, no, it is real. You know, I remember, in high school, you know, I had friends that were going out, going to parties doing regular teenage things, actually being out past nine, or what have you. And my mom really had some very strict rules for us. You know, we weren't allowed out past dark. We were never allowed out to parties, everyone we drove with, she had to really know their parents. I mean, it was a pretty strict household. And I didn't understand it at the time. But now, as I see my kiddo, and I just reflect on teenagers in general, and just our development at that age, I can sort of understand it, especially with the weight of, "We're still figuring this thing out, and I don't really know how to fully keep you safe. All I really know is that you're safe in my home. And that's what I can rely on." And so it's part of what I reflect on, too, is how tough as a parent, it must have been to know that that was potentially your only recourse and to understand, I imagine, to some degree, the pain that that might cause on your children. I you know, I struggle with even asking Gabby to do something she doesn't want to do. So it's it's a tricky situation when then you bring it back to such heavy consequences.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 22:42

So yes. And fast forwarding a little you went through the citizenship process?

A Ana Wacker 22:49

I did. I did. That happened!

J Jasmine Bradshaw 22:54

Yes, that was a thing. I'm just wondering, can you tell us what is it like, tell us about it? Because I think a lot of people, well, I think a lot of people have a lot of misconceptions about what it looks like. And I realized that there's such a huge sacrifice of both time and money. So yeah, just tell us a little bit about that process and what it was like for you?

A Ana Wacker 23:18



Yeah, it's, um, I think it's complicated to begin with. So I often encourage people, as they're thinking about immigration, or developing opinions, or stances, to really take time to learn and understand. To be quite honest, the path I know is the path I went through, and there are probably 1000s of permutations to it, as well. So it's just a very complicated, nuanced process, depending on how much you make, who your parents are, what country you're from, what jobs your parents had, family that you may or may not have in the state. So so many factors go into getting through to the citizenship process. But for me, it really began much later in my life. So I was in the States for quite some time in what I like to call the "pending process," but that might not be the the legal term. But you know, I was in the States, I was growing up largely unaware of what the next step would look like. And then eventually, by the time I was in college " I still remember this day, I was a sophomore " and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals was passed, or Obama decreed it. And a few months or weeks later, I received a paper in the mail and it had, you know, my work permit and sort of my first legal acknowledgement of this country that I could function and exist without repercussions. And I was paralyzed. I had no idea what to do, how to function, who to be, how to think anything, because so much of my life had been, work really hard, be better than anybody else around you, and stay out of trouble and eventually, you'll have this moment where life will just make sense. And so this was kind of the micro moment of it, right? Because it wasn't the end of the process. But I had a great friend at school, we're still best friends today, and I called her and I said, "I need you to come outside, because I don't really know what to do." And she had known my story, we had connected a lot, because I feel like college creates such a great space to have deep relationships. And so I told her, you know, exactly what had happened, exactly what had come through. And I think she had applied with me, like helped me fill out the paperwork and do all that. So she was really aware. And she was so confused. She looked at me, she was like, "What do you mean, you don't know what to do? This is amazing. This is what you're waiting for." But, you know, the first step was really, the first thought I had was, "I don't know how to be myself, because I don't know who to be now." I'd been defined so long in my life by this thing I had or didn't have, by this process that I was welcomed in, but not by this whole larger sphere of issues and processes outside of my control, that having the ability to function without repercussions was just overwhelming. And so that first step was so overwhelming that I said, "Okay, well, I don't. I'm not ready to process. So I'm just gonna do," and I ended up going to get a job. I said, "Well, I can legally work now. So I want a job a regular job, just like anyone has." So I got a job at the zoo, working on a train. I did it one day, and was like, "You know, I kind of prefer my tutoring job that did not require the screaming children 24/7." But I sort of was just trying to flex, you know, what can I do with this now? And so I was benefiting from DACA, and was really thankful for that, because it made my post-college life so much more clear. I could legally work, which meant all of the work I was doing, the training I was getting, was going to be for something I could I could contribute to the economy, which is all I really wanted to do. I had so much gratitude for everything that I was able to experience in this country that all I really wanted was a way to contribute and to be part in a way that was validated. So I was on DACA most of college. And then the process that I ended up going through was a family sponsorship process. So by this time my parents were citizens already. Whenever you're a family member of a citizen, they're able to request for you to be a resident, so my parents were getting their citizenship. And that actually has to happen in a parent-child relationship before the child turns 21. So I still remember getting a call a week before my 21st birthday from my mom. And she was just in tears beside herself. I knew she had been working on our citizenship process. And I knew it was close. I think they had given her like a date in June or something that she was going to get it. So I just was hoping you know, that DACA would be around forever, and then everything would be okay. But she called me a week before and said, "I don't know what

happened. I don't know who pulled what and what person is, is trying to help us but I just got a swearing in ceremony a couple of days before your 21st birthday. So I'm going to be able to put you in through this process."

J Jasmine Bradshaw 29:13
Oh my goodness.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 29:15
And I still get emotional about it to this day because it was such a divine moment of intervention. And such a sigh of relief for me. So my mom went through that process. She got her citizenship and the day afterwards, because my mom is a very Type-A person, all of my paperwork was submitted. A Day after she had her citizenship. Yeah, and I want to say six months later " which is usually not the case, it's usually at least a year if not more because of the backlog of of cases " but six months later, I had my residency card in the mail and was able to start off my senior year of college just as a, what I thought a regular old person, just a regular person starting senior year, getting ready to go in the job market. So that part of the journey was so involved and really special to be able to have the opportunity. And then after I got my residency card, when you get your green card, as it's commonly known, you have to wait five years in order to apply for your citizenship, unless you obtained your Green Card card via spouse, you have to wait three. So following that waiting period, I, during the pandemic was able to apply for my citizenship. And the paperwork was extensive. Part of it is you have to list everywhere you've lived in the country.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 30:54
And it's hard to remember even...

A Ana Wacker 30:57
Right, it's hard to remember. And then you have college in there, right, where you live...

J Jasmine Bradshaw 31:01
...all over the place...

i 31:04
...every four months, and some friend's house every month, and you want to be exact, so you need to put it like the exact day because you don't want to get anything wrong. Because any little thing that's wrong is another delay, correction, and addendum. So I did that. Six weeks

after my daughter was born, my mom came for a week, and we filled out the application together. And I remember submitting it or filling out the paperwork to send off holding my six week old in my arms,

J Jasmine Bradshaw 31:40
oh my gosh,

A Ana Wacker 31:42
...just being so thankful that the start of her life would be so different. And so marked by acceptance and hurdles that she wouldn't have to cross I was just I had this moment of just pure joy and gratitude and thankfulness because I was excited for a generation of fresh start, a generation of a different type of life for her. And, you know, I'm very grateful for everything that being an immigrant has taught me and the values that I've gained, but I also would not put or wish a child to go through that level of intensity so young, so I was so thankful to do that, too. Holding her in my arms and just knowing, "You are safe, and not just in my home. You are safe everywhere you go.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 32:37
Wow. Okay, now that was so powerful. I was thinking about while you were talking one time you posted on your stories, like questions from the tests that you had to take. I got so many of them wrong. I was like, "I would not pass this test. I don't think the average American would be able to pass this test." And it just made me I don't know, frustrated, annoyed that you had to go through all of this stuff. And it Yeah, it was just so bananas.

A Ana Wacker 33:12
It was such an interesting, like social experience, to or social experiment to have on Instagram. Because at first when I was getting ready to do the test, I was also annoyed. I was like, I've had like seven years of history, I think I'm good. But I understand the process. So I said, you know, I want to know, I'm just curious, you know, how would my sphere of humans do on this. And it was a great way to engage with people both on the immigration process, but also on what we expect people from other countries to know and understand about the US and, and how that portrays our story. I thought that for me, that was a very interesting part of taking the tests and knowing which answers are on there. And knowing which questions are asked, just what that represents is important to the US, I think is is the point of noodling or consideration.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 34:17
Yeah. Oh, yeah, definitely. Well, that makes me wonder, what are some things that you feel like or you would like to see changed about the immigration process or policies that you think that we should be advocating for when it comes to this citizenship journey?

A

Ana Wacker 34:36

There's so much that can be done. And there's also so much complexity. One of the things I try to keep in mind is just the level of complexity of immigration, not just in the US, but in the entire world. I think we're facing a time period where globalization, climate crises or what have you was, are really making different areas of this world hard places to exist and live in. And so the demand for immigration just globally is, is rising. So I think when I think about immigration policies that would be interesting to explore, where I always try to start with people, is to actually share more immigration stories, because I think a lot of what we see about immigration are statistics, are crime rates. They are job numbers, a lot of actually non-human elements of this system. And so I think I would love to see more stories shared and told about the people behind these numbers, the people that, frankly, keep our homes built to some degree, the people that move a large part of this economy. Who are they? What are their stories and why they're here? Because I feel like that understanding would bring such a human element back to this discussion, the reality that for someone to choose to leave the only place they know, take their family, learn a new language, put their entire safety at risk, there is a story under that that is worth hearing. I think that's usually where I start.

A

Ana Wacker 36:26

Because I find that those stories help remind people that being born in America, being born in Mexico, being born anywhere, is the luck of the draw. We did nothing to be in a specific body and a specific person at a specific time. You know, I'm sure there's a higher power and order of things sort of navigating some of those things, and like we out of our own will and fruition did not choose that. So to have the benefits that we have, though there is a lot of room for growth in this country as well, it's but to have the benefits that we have of being born in America. I think it's something we all need to noodle on a little bit as to the fact that we didn't do anything in our own right to gain these things. And so stories I think are so important. But to actually answer your question on the policy-wise, I think it's twofold. I think the first is really taking a look at how our actual international policy exacerbates sort of the demand for immigration but also isn't fully honoring to the countries that we're working with. I think immigration or international policy in the US needs to be something that we do in a way that is beneficial for our country, and also sort of as my mom used to say, leaving other places better than we came into them is so beneficial, I think for the countries that we're working with, because the US is a very powerful international country, we see that and all the crises that we see right now in the world, and the way that we choose to handle our policy at a global stage reflects so much about what's okay for other nations to do that I think that's actually the first place to start, which seems a little disconnected. But I think it's really important because of just the global world that we're living in. But I think domestically, what's really important to consider and think about is how were the laws that we're living in working through the expectations that we have of immigrants, would we go through those ourselves? Do those laws make sense for people that are even already citizens of this country with someone who lives here is born here, be able to or willing to do the things that we're asking immigrants to do? And I think that thought process is really helpful for us to start thinking critically about how do we build immigration law, that, of course, you know, needs to support our economic outcomes or growth as a country, all of that, but also make sense. You know, there are studies that show that the lines of people following legal process, the lines are yours, by the time people are going to ever receive those documents, their their time on this earth is done often by that time. There are studies that show in the places where immigration is needed the most to actually sustain the economy and

allow for growth have the most strict treatment of immigrants. So if we look at it, not just from a policy of protection of the US but also from a policy I have economic responsibility and social responsibility. I think we find that even though there are there are and I have to admit, there are some drawbacks, immigration, the net summation is so much greater. And something that I think our country would definitely benefit from.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 40:20

Yes. Oh, my gosh, I had so many thoughts while you were talking. Oh, my goodness. Okay. First, when you were talking about sharing stories, I was like, that is literally First Name Basis, right, like getting to know someone on a first-name basis. And there's science behind hearing and understanding someone's story and having compassion for one another in a way that is just can't necessarily be reflected in policies. So I was so so grateful that you touched on that. And the other piece of it was just some frustrating things that come up when we're having conversations with people about immigration. I mean, there are two things that come to mind that I've heard over and over. One is that people, people will tell me, "Oh, you know, what we need to do is just go into these other countries and teach them how to run their countries so that people don't have to come here." And I'm like, "Oh, yeah, so teach them like systemic racism and patriarchy." And like, yeah, we're doing a great job at that. And then the other thing that people often say is, "Oh, well, people should just come here the right way." So I'm wondering, what I mean, besides being like, "Shut your mouth," like, what do we say to these people when they say these things?

A Ana Wacker 41:34

You know, I think one thing I've learned from you, when people say interesting things, is to get curious, you know? I would ask them, "Well, what is the right way? What? What do you understand the right way to be?" Because I feel like often when people say, "right," what they're really trying to communicate is the morally right way. There's a morally right way to emigrate. There's a morally right way to get this done. There's a morally right way to search for a better life while not impeding on my amazing life. And oftentimes, that morality, is conflated with legality. And right now, I'm in the process of figuring out what what do I want to do with, you know, the rest of my life? And so I've been toying around with potentially going to law school. And so I've been studying for the LSAT. And one of the things that's come up in that journey, which I know you have a lot of questions about that probably which we can unpack later. But one of the things that's come up in a lot of my work on that journey has been that our legal system is a legal system. It's not a moral system. And so our wishes and our dreams and our wants and our desires are for it to be a moral system. At the end of the day, our legal system right now is a system of history, power, and process. So when we try to say, "Do things the right way," I think what "right" tends to mean is "legal," but it tends to be confused with moral and what is currently legal right now in the immigration system. I don't think most people would classify as moral. And I think we see that in the outrage of what happened as unaccompanied minors were crossing the border. And the outrage of what happens when people cross seas and and their lives are lost. We see that disconnection between legality and more morality, because we see people as humans. So my first, my first inclination is always get curious. And then my second is to think for ourselves. When we think, right way, or moral way, or legal way, do we kind of understand that distinction and, and try to work in ways that help make our legal way, our laws or policies more aligned with the values that we want to have?

But always remember that the way a person, a case, an idea is processed through the legal system is often due to power and the timing and history. And that is something that most immigrants don't have access to. I think the most immigrants need language, they need connections, they need people that they know to advocate for them in this country. And when you're coming without any of that your ability to influence even for yourself gets really hard to create. So that's kind of where I would start is, "What is the right way? What do you think that way is?" And let's talk about a little bit how, you know, I think you want it to mean morally but legally, these are the things that are actually real.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 45:00

Wow, that's brilliant. That's so brilliant. And I know you said you learned that from me. But I really wouldn't have like thought of that I would have been like, "Here are all my reasons why you should be, you know, changing your mind." So I'm really, really grateful that you pointed that out. And I'm also thinking about how I really don't think that people consider you talked a lot about your family and your parents fearing for your safety, your physical safety. And I'm thinking about the toll that that took not only on the mental health of your parents, but probably on yourself, too. I don't think people consider the way that the immigration system can affect the mental health of everyone who's involved. And so I'm wondering, what would supportive mental health care look like for people who are going through this process?

A

Ana Wacker 45:52

I thought about this a lot. Because you're right, it does, it has a huge impact of mental health. I remember when I was in college, and went to see my first mental health counselor, I sort of, I think talked about what I thought was going on, which was probably some college drama. It wasn't quite as critical. But then eventually, the individual started to ask me a little bit about my life. And then I finally told her, "Oh, yeah, I emigrated here when I was four," she was like, "Oh, we need to start there. And then we can do work." Because it's, you know, it's, it's all-encompassing when you are thinking through, operating, honestly, from a scarcity and lack of safety mindset for so many years. And then there's this need to also transition after that, right. So when I got my work permit through DACA, and then my residency, and then eventually my citizenship, each of those processes, I had to learn different neural connections, different behaviors, different ways of coping, because I was in a different space of safety. And all of that cannot be done alone. So I think, to start, where I first sort of identified maybe a place that that could be more supportive on the mental health realm is that kids especially need a safe place to go to and process and think. For us, we were really blessed as a family to have access to Catholic Charities. And they did a lot of mental health support that didn't require insurance, because you also have to think immigrants don't have access to a banking system, oftentimes don't have access to health care. So there needs to be a lot of ways to make these resources available, almost without all of the need for those resources that are available to citizens of the US. So Catholic Charities is a great organization that does a lot of that work. We had many family sessions there to just sort of help and keep us together, because it was a hard process. But I really do think that just truly anonymous mental health services for immigrants, because as you touched on a little bit earlier, knowing who to trust is really hard. And one of the things my parents inadvertently, I think, taught us at a young age was, "This is part of your story, but this is a part we don't discuss, because you just never know." And it wasn't really until I sort of started making my own independent choices where I tested the line of that, because that was

like, "I hear you, but I also can't function if I don't have some support." So I think that safe, protected mental health support in schools is really important. And I know that gets all sorts of complicated, because schools are already underfunded and underresourced, in general. But I think schools are such a safe haven for immigrants because they can provide a place where you sort of forget, and you sort of can focus on something else, at least in my experience that I had, and that place was a really big safe haven for me. So lots of therapists this was really the only kind of provocative thing I came up with. It's really critical and it's crucial. And community, I think, would be the second. I didn't hear of any other immigrant, I'd never crossed paths with another person that I knew was living my similar story until, I forget his name, I think it was Jose Antonio, I forget his last name, it might be Vargas, but it might be something different. I'll look it up so you can add it to the notes, but he came for school, he was an undocumented immigrant that wrote a book, and was publicly sharing his story in a time where there was a big push for immigration reform. So he came to St. Mary's and did a presentation. And I remember hearing his story and thinking, "This is the first person I know that shares my story." And I know there was no way that was, that was the only person I had ever encountered. But it was the only person that I almost shared a moment with, even though he was publicly talking to 500 people. I just, I wish I had had more of those moments as a child and that I grew up in South Texas, you know, we're 150 miles from the border, it's a heavy immigrant community. So there were other humans, but we never really had those moments. So I think a form of community, whether it's a nonprofit organization that really creates a safe space for immigrants is also important. Because there's such loneliness and isolation. And honestly, a lot of loss, really, because these stories are pretty awesome. The things that people go through and overcome and advocate, show so much bravery and determination. And one of the things I missed is seeing that in my Hispanic immigrant community, because I was so focused on moving forward and moving out and moving ahead, that I didn't have time to appreciate it. So I would say, community and therapist are two big things.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 51:29

Oh, wow. Yeah, that's so important and so powerful. And it made me think of, if anyone here is listening from Arizona, there is an organization called Aliento AZ. And what they do is art therapy for first generation immigrant children. And they go to different schools and do presentations. So yeah, I'm pretty sure it's just alientoaz.com. I know you can find them on Instagram. But that is such a great resource. You have shared so many really powerful and inspiring things. And I'm wondering if you can tell us, like, if you had an opportunity to go back in time and share some words of encouragement to your younger self, what would you tell her?

A

Ana Wacker 52:13

Oh, so so many things. I think I would start with a reminder of her inherent worth. One of the things that being undocumented and pending process, not fully accepted, I think initially in the States is it allowed me to believe that I didn't have, I wasn't going to have worth until this country said I did. And so so much of my worth was tied into when I'm validated by the system, my life will be worthy of my own experience. And so I think I would really start with, "You have so much worth because you breathe the air, because you are alive, because you exist. And for that reason you have worth," because it's so critical to have that available. I think for any person, immigrant or not, at a young age, because I think it really can impact the choices, the things you seek the dreams you have, as you grow older. So that's where I would start, I think

is just, "You're worthy." There's worth in you simply because you are human. And then I think I would kind of take her and I used to fall asleep actually, when I was a kiddo, for a long time, a couple of years with a small, like squishy stress ball like globe. And I remember as a kid holding this globe and just wondering like, "Dang, I wonder what the world is like. I wonder what is outside this space." And so I think I would kind of follow with that. And a reminder of that experience and a reminder that the world is so big. It's so so big. It's so much bigger than becoming a US citizen. It's so much bigger than this country accepting you. It's so big. So take a moment, have those goals. But remember, don't forget to dream and stay curious and wonder and have a moment to remember that the world is so big. Because I think when your world becomes so narrow geographically, you really can't leave a region. You don't have access to your home country. You don't have access to your home culture. Your world is very small because of safety. It becomes easy to believe that this is all you'll ever know or be. And you know, I'm almost starting now I've lived all over, we lived in New York for a time together and I'm now gallivanting through the streets of downtown Boston every once in a while, and it's wild, it's wild to think this is my life. And they also wonder, you know, how much bigger can the world get? Because I know there's more. So I would kind of give her that thought early on. And then I think the last point of encouragement that I would give her is, "This is hard, but it's not hard because you're making it hard, and it's okay to think about how hard it is." There was a lot in my life that I sort of white knuckled and pushed through, because all I knew was, "This is difficult, but I'm still not good enough," is the story I told myself to push myself through the survival stage of my childhood. So I think I would remind myself, "This is hard, and it's okay for it to be hard, and you're not making this any harder. And it's okay to take a breath and a minute and rest and be a kid and forget about dominating the world for a minute," so that you can, so you can be, you know, a US citizen and take a moment to be a child, because I'm reliving a lot of that now with my child. And it's fun to heal those parts and pretend to be a three-year-old with no care on the world, but I also wish I could have done that in my own shoes.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 56:31

Yeah, so that was what I was thinking when you were sharing. I thought, "Oh, man, I'm so happy for your little one that she has this mama with so much wisdom to share in, especially in these little stages of life?" Yeah, it's special. Yeah. So as you know, here at First Name Basis, we talk so much about talking to children. So what advice do you have for other parents or caregivers who are starting this conversation about immigration with their kids or students? What would you say they should do?

A

Ana Wacker 57:04

Yeah, I've had so much time to think about this. And I think, at first, I would just make sure that parents and caregivers feel empowered to talk about the subject in general, there's so much unknown about immigration, both for children and adults. And it's definitely a complicated topic. And I know you show a lot of ways of how to sort of talk about these complicated topics, in ways that are age appropriate for our children. But I think to start is is to not shy away from talking about it. Because in the silence is where so many holes are filled in not just for children, but even for adults as well. So my first piece of advice is, is try even if it's imperfect, take take a chance at it, go to the USIAD website with your child, kind of look at what's out there and available, because they will learn so much with you if you are curious. And then I think

specifically for caregivers who are raised, raising sort of anti-racist, socially conscious, civilly active children, I would really encourage them to discuss with their children, just the concepts, not just of immigration, but also of what it means to be a global citizen, and of how those ideas are interrelated and connected of how the world is so interdependent as an entity, and to think about what those ideas mean about the way that we live as citizens of America, because a lot of immigrants or maybe just myself, actually, I'll speak for myself, is ultimately as an immigrant child. And now as a citizen of the US, what I really wanted to do was to contribute to this country, and to be like every other citizen of America, and I think kids and parents that are already in this country or are citizens and have all the rights available, the more you all can think of how to use those rights of how to be conscious and civil and critically aware citizenships of the US, I think the more that I can learn what it looks like to be so engaged, what it looks like to make the most of my right to vote, what it looks like to make the most of my right to organize. I'm looking for people who have had these rights longer than me to learn how to do that. So not just in learning about immigration, but also in learning about what does it mean to really use our privilege of being American citizens. If we're all using that to the best of its ability then it becomes so much more apparent of what it means to be a citizen after you become one, and I love sort of being able to model and to learn from other people how to become more engaged. I've learned a ton from First Name Basis, I've also learned a ton from other people sharing facts and history about the US that have helped me just become a better citizen now that I know that I am. So I would say, really use your privilege as an American citizen to learn more about the rights and the freedoms and the power that you have access to, and use that to benefit others and benefit your community. Because ultimately, immigration is the act of coming in and wanting to be part of a new space in a new community. And if we can do that as actively and civically engaged as possible, I think that will be an amazing outcome. I think what I would also advise parents and caregivers to think through and to talk about immigration as a process as a experience, as a thing that happens, but to avoid unless asked to identifying and labeling people in their status of that process, because I think that dehumanizes so much of the experience and sort of reduces immigrants to "undocumented" or "illegal," or those words that have so much more complexity to them, and don't really define a person. And so oftentimes, when I talk about my status, and when we first started this, I'll say, you know, "I am a first-generation immigrant," because I did go through the process of immigrating. But I have trouble always using "undocumented," sometimes I use, "I was in a legally-pending status," because to me, it's important to feel like, the process is not in my control, but who I am is, and there's something... who I am is bigger than this sort of man-made process that I had to go through. So I would say, you know, give kids language on the process, and the larger forces that play and help them remember that immigrants, just like everyone else, are human beings trying to do their best and live their best every day.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 1:02:28

Wow, that was powerful. And I frickin' love that you reminded us to spend our privilege. That is so good. And I'm just so grateful. I'm so grateful for you and for your story and sharing so much wisdom with us. Thank you so much for being here.

A

Ana Wacker 1:02:43

Yeah, thanks for having me. I'm glad I could come on and chat a little bit. I love to see sort of how the conversation goes and expands. Thanks for giving me a space to share my story. This is the first time I've sort of done so from a place of healing. So I really appreciate that.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 1:02:59

All right. She was amazing. I mean, if you did not shed tears along with us, is your heart made of stone? I'm just kidding. I'm totally kidding. I know a lot of you are not criers. I've gotten a lot of DMS, about how much I get teary, and you're like, "I'm just not like that." There is nothing wrong with that. But I was like, so emotional throughout the whole episode, because it was so powerful for me as someone who does know her as a friend to be able to hear the story and to feel the trust that she put in the First Name Basis community to hold her story. And I really hope that you will treat her story as sacred and worthy. And one of the things that I wanted to point out is that I'm not going to share her social media, because this is her personal account where she just shares about her sweet family and her life and things like that. So I'm not necessarily encouraging you to go follow her on there. But what I do want you to do is if you see us posting throughout the week about this episode, will you please go leave some comments on those posts so that she can see how grateful we are that she shared a piece of herself with us. I think one of the greatest things about this community is the support that you show for me as the host of this podcast and for the guests that we have on, so I hope that you'll go and share with her what you learned and what you're taking away and how you're moving forward in your activism and in your advocacy after listening to this episode.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 1:04:33

Okay, I love you all so much and I will talk to you next Tuesday.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 1:04:40

My friends, thank you for being here. I hope you can feel how much I believe in you and how deeply I know that when we work together, we can make real change in our communities. Any of the books, podcasts, or articles that I reference will be linked in the show notes. If you are looking for more detailed notes, be sure to head over to our Patreon community. On our Patreon site I provide all of the outlines that I use to make the episodes and everything is linked there so you don't have to take furious notes while you are listening. And don't forget to join us over on Instagram @firstname.basis. If you're interested in partnering with First Name Basis or doing some kind of collaboration, please email us at hello @firstnamebasis.org. All right, have a great week my friends and I will talk to you again soon.