

To young immigrants,

I don't know who you are or where you are from, but I, too, know coming to this country is not easy.

My very first words in English were "A McChicken meal. Medium, large, or small?"

At the time, I worked as a cashier at a McDonald's in Miami, Florida.

It was not what I wanted to do, but it was what I needed to do.

See, I lived in Venezuela until I was 14. Venezuela has been under an authoritarian regime for over two decades, which later became in a total anarchy – the government controls everything. A lot of people struggle economically. Going to school was a privilege there, not a right. You can't speak out against the government without the risk of getting killed or persecuted.

Because the law is so non-existent in my country, as a child, I became fascinated with it: Why is the law necessary? What is the rule of law? How do we apply that?

I knew at ten years old I wanted to be a lawyer. I wanted to save people from unfairness. However, I also knew it wouldn't be easy to become a lawyer living in Venezuela.

Then, when I was 14 years old, my mother worked as a Sales Representative for the most important exporting and importing industry of medicines, psychotropics—known as legal drugs—, and miscellaneous specializing in the distribution of such medicines and miscellaneous wholesale products to different pharmacies, clinics, and hospitals throughout the country, Venezuela. As the lead representative of the North area in Venezuela. At that time, the government wanted to take over the company. In February, July, September, and October of 2016, my mom was persecuted by a group of people, known as “The Collectives”, which are thieves that the corrupt repressive government in Venezuela pays them to abuse, harass, kidnap, and even kill people that work for companies or protest against the government. Attempting to coerce her into providing information about her company, she experienced physical, mental, and psychological torture. After that horrific experience, she knew we needed to move to the United States.

Two years later, we left the only home I ever knew, and we came to South Florida with only one \$100 bill. At first, we stayed with a mother's friend for about five months. Then, unexpectedly my mother and I were homeless for the next year and a half. We stayed in eight places – friends and even strangers willing to give us a place to sleep for a month or so. One of the most challenging memories was getting groceries. We didn't have a car, so we'd have to walk miles and miles, which wasn't easy in the Miami heat - especially during the summertime.

My mom always told me education would be the escape from all of my struggles and obstacles. Also, I knew I needed an education if I wanted to become a lawyer. But that first semester of school was tough. Every day I would go home with a headache because I didn't know the language. During the first nine weeks, I almost failed three classes. But then, I started to write down what my teachers would say, and when I got home, I would use google translate. Also, I was working at McDonald's so my mother and I could afford a place to live. And that helped me learn the language faster. After six months, I had a good handle on the language. So much so that McDonald's promoted me to a supervisor and crew trainer of the store. After a year, I was fluent in English, and thanks to my promotion at McDonald's, my mother and I eventually moved into a one-bedroom apartment of our own. Paying rent for the first time with my mom

will always be my proudest accomplishment. It was a major step into the rest of our lives.

As we became more and more settled in the U.S., I continued to focus on becoming a lawyer. I had a goal and no plan B. I was determined. Every day, I showed up to school on time and stayed after class to ask my teachers questions about how it was to live a successful life in the U.S. I even started a student organization to help raise money for school supplies for kids in Venezuela. Thanks to my hard work and help from my teachers and mentors, I graduated cum laude of my class. Florida International University (FIU) awarded me a full-ride scholarship. My mother cried when we received the letter. People I didn't even know cried. While I didn't show as much emotion, I was excited, proud, and grateful for everyone who helped me along the way.

Now, in my junior year of college, I am getting closer and closer to my goal of becoming a lawyer. I am among 20 students around the world that were accepted into a pipeline program at Stanford Law called Stanford Law Scholars Institute. It is a new program catered to underrepresented communities. Also, I have already completed eight internships and three fellowships. Right now, I am in D.C. working for the Bipartisan Policy Center.

After law school, I want to focus on constitutional law and become the first ever Hispanic male Supreme Court Justice one day. I have so much work ahead of me, but I am focused and determined, just like I have always been.

For you, life may seem so hard and so overwhelming right now. Your goals might feel out of reach, as you might simply be more concerned with where you will sleep tonight than the career you wish to have in 20 years.

Even so, I want you to understand that the steps you take today, big or small, will help create opportunities beyond what you may currently be able to imagine. To get there, here are some tips that have helped me along the way.

For starters, breathe. Just breathe. There are so many emotions that you are currently feeling and will feel. I have been meditating twice daily for ten years - when I wake up and go to sleep. It helps me control my emotions. You could also try hiking, exercise, or a hobby - something to let your mind relax a little.

Curiosity is essential. I was curious about becoming a lawyer, learning the language, and getting internships. Curiosity will lead to knowledge, and knowledge will lead to growth.

Once you do this, then start to believe that this isn't going to be an easy journey. Don't be afraid to ask for help, especially if you start to feel desperate or like you don't know what to do next to move forward. People will give you the tools to help you pave your path.

There are also tools you can give yourself just by reading. Read, read, read, read and read some more. Listen to a podcast or Audible book if you don't like to read. There is so much valuable information in books and podcasts that you can use to your advantage.

Lastly, don't (never) be afraid to tell your story. Your story has power, and your delivery is the most powerful tool you can ever have. It will connect you to other people, empower yourself to overcome upcoming obstacles, and inspire others.

A few years ago, I worked at McDonald's, only knowing a few English words. For many, they would never guess I would be where I am today. And I'm not even close to done. I am still very much writing

my story, as are you. But I want you to know - no matter what people say or how hard this moment in time feels - that America is a great place, and it's exceeded all of my expectations. And that is because no matter who you are or where you are from, in America, if you stay focused, true to yourself and values, you can become whatever it is that you want to be.

Keep pushing!

Warmest regards,

Luis Moros