00:00:00 Speaker 1

Getting your citizenship after immigrating to the United States can be a difficult and lengthy process. Process can take anywhere from 18 to 24 months. This can add extra stress to all members of the family, especially a student in the high school. The added stress of getting a green card and citizenship can negatively affect grades, relationships and high school experience. I will be interviewing Catherine Stanish, a person from my high school who recently had to deal with this.

00:00:26 Speaker 1

I am here with Catherine Stanish. So when did you first move to the US?

00:00:31 Speaker 2

I first moved to the US a month before my third birthday, so it was in August of 2007.

00:00:40 Speaker 1

What country did you immigrate from?

00:00:42 Speaker 2

Parents and I immigrated from India. My dad originally was coming to the US to study, and so we had a host family who sponsored who like sponsored my grandparents when my grandfather was studying in the US and so they sponsored us as well.

00:00:58 Speaker 1

How is life there different from the US?

00:01:00 Speaker 2

I honestly don't really remember much of life in India and most of my memories are from like going back and going on vacation. Over the summer, where we would live there for maybe 1-2 months before coming back to the states. But, from my recollection living in the US is a lot more like luxurious in comparison. Especially like the difference in specifically people like working class, so like people that you know have nine to five jobs. Like making steady incomes and are decently well to do in the US. Us by the same standard, people that are, you know, having the similar work schedules, they're not getting the same amount of income. They're not getting that stability that comes with having like a full time job and a lot of them are heavily uneducated in comparison because of, you know, wage gaps and diversity. Not diversity, but like some like a sort of segregation in the sense that people that are poor are assumed to stay poor and so there aren't systems built in place that help them gain education and move up social classes and like, improve their living conditions.

00:02:10 Speaker 1

So it's a lot harder to get that poverty gotcha.

00:02:11 Speaker 2

So it's a lot harder to get out of poverty. The cycle of poverty is really, really bad. And it's generational. And so even in families that are able to access, like, you know, government jobs and, like, get good jobs and allow their kids for education, depending on like their social status of their family originally, they're constantly like prohibited from, like going any further than a certain point. So like, you know, you have like your American dream of like rags to riches, upper middle class or lower high class. But like in India, it's like that can happen, but you're not allowed to go past a certain point where it's like, yeah, you've worked hard and like theoretically, you'd be like making good money and like living like a good life by standards. But people don't let you get past that point. Like it's societal pressure that like people that are poor, should stay poor and should not work hard to get education and like go anywhere higher.

00:03:02 Speaker 1

So there's a big interest in moving somewhere else in order to get out of that poor social class.

00:03:07 Speaker 2

Yeah, yeah. So a ton of like the main reason why India's economy hasn't fallen is because a lot of the working class men, like, especially the men, are working in places like Singapore and Indonesia and the Middle East doing like working class jobs there and sending money back to India, which is like keeping the infrastructure of the country like gong.

00:03:30 Speaker 1

What were some of the difficulties that you found of trying to fit in?

00:03:34 Speaker 2

It really depends on the environment that I was in. So like when I was little, I was in a public school that had like a lot of diversity. And so it wasn't really that like hard for me to fit in because there were a ton of kids from India there too, that were friends of mine, kids that were from completely different countries, like Ethiopia and made a really solid and strong community through that, which is probably why like I didn't really have many difficulties like, you know, assimilating to American culture. When I was younger but. When I started going to private school in Saint Louis is mainly when I felt like difficulties because I was removed from like a really diverse and ethnically spread out.

00:04:11 Speaker 1

Like there was a lot of different ethnicities.

00:04:12 Speaker 2

Yeah. Yeah. Like there was like 50-60 different countries represented in my elementary school. And then I went to a private school and all of a sudden, I'm the only person of color within, like, a 7 mile radius of the school. You know? So it was like. That's really where I started having challenges, which was like in 7th and 8th grade, which is like a weird time to start having problems like dealing with friends and.

00:04:33 Speaker 1

Especially with like the hormone differences and trying to fit in and all that stuff.

00:04:36 Speaker 2

Yeah, yeah, like puberty. And like, you know, middle school is already like a horrible, horrible time. That kind of like exasperated the difficulties I was having, you know, getting used to being in, like a predominantly white environment and like schooling differently because public schools and private schools do not school the same, a lot of the times and you know, like changing learning styles and changing environments.

00:04:55 Speaker 1

How do you think your history affected the way you experience high school?

00:04:59 Speaker 2

The main thing that I think affected how I experienced high school is my community in elementary because as a young kid, you know, like being in a school setting that was like diverse and was small and there was a really big sense of, like, togetherness, which is like really heavily impacted in my school experience because it it's what led me to come to collegiate and not like going to like Lutheran South or like moving up to Kansas and going to Concordia like a completely secluded private boarding school.

00:05:29 Speaker 1

So what drove you to collegiate was the diversity?

00:05:31 Speaker 2

Yeah, it was like partly the diversity and also like I knew that the school like being a magnet school, they would really promote learning, especially learning of science, which is a field that I want to go into. And so the fact that I found this like as an eighth grader looking at different schools when I found out that collegiate was like an option for me, I was like immediately drawn to it because I was like, oh, this school is going to have the environment that I want to learn the things that I want. Along with kids that also care about learning as much as I do. And you know, like not having that in middle school, going into high school, really like I need these like characteristics for my high school experience. Or just like what greatly shaped it because if I went to a different school, I would not have had at all the same experience I have right now.

00:06:16 Speaker 1

How do you feel that your peers are being able to like, get their license and driving and experiencing like those high school things, while you can't necessarily do that because of like your green card and all that stuff?

00:06:27 Speaker 2

Yeah, that's a good question. It was so, to like give a little bit background context. As an immigrant you need to have specific documentation to get government documents and so a drivers license or a permit is considered like a legal government document as well as like Social Security number and like opening a bank account. So and I wasn't even able to work for a while too. As a high school student I started my own social enterprise like small business with a friend and this like starting the business probably is what like made me realize like Oh my gosh like I'm way different than the other kids involved in this business because they were also, we hire young women from different parts of the world that are refugees and immigrants as well. But the difference was is that they were able to get like the documentation that they needed sooner because they were coming as refugees and not as immigrants. So they were coming because it was unsafe for them in their home country and so the government was giving them refuge in the state, so they were given, you know, the papers that they needed to, like, work and open bank accounts to get license and on time. According to their age, but because my family and I are immigrants and we're coming by choice, the process is a lot longer and a lot more tedious, and there's a lot more like stops you have to take. And so like. I was 15 and so ready to get my permit just to find out that I can’t because my family does not have the proper documentation for me to like get the permit. And so that was like extremely frustrating cause I was like I'm so ready like I wanna learn to drive like I'm gonna do like your stereotypical high school things that you like see in American movies. And now that I be in high school like I can’t even do those things. So I was absolutely so frustrated because it was like I had this image about what like my high school experience would be.

00:08:07 Speaker 1

Like every kid dreams of high school.

00:08:08 Speaker 2

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So it's like we all have, like, Oh my gosh, I'm gonna be a sophomore. I'm gonna be like, having my own car. I'm gonna like have this all this freedom because I'm like going to where I want to go, but it's like I can't though, because something completely out of my control and completely unrelated is stopping me from doing that so. 10 out of 10 do not recommend it. It was horrible.

00:08:26 Speaker 1

How does the stress from home and like getting your green card and all that documentation affect your school life?

00:08:33 Speaker 2

I did my best to make sure that I didn't affect my school life because high school is already like mad stressful and like having to add an extra layer of oh is what I'm even doing like matter anymore. It really affects your like perseverance and like going through high school and having to like, you know, do the work. And like your motivation for like getting good grades and working hard and studying hard. Because, you know, you have like a voice in the back of your mind being like, oh, but if you don’t get the papers, you have to go home and like your high school, it's just like all that hard work is going to be meaningless then. It's like, oh, well, then should I even try? Cause it’s like you know, just because there's a probability that what you're doing won't even like be counted for anything. It makes you just like your psyche like, really go down and just, like, it's really depressing to be like, oh, I'm going to work extra extra hard on like getting an A in this and all my classes and making sure that I’m actually learning and gaining the skill. To just like someone to tell you well you’re 18 now and you have to go home. This graded isn't going to matter because you're going to be in India. You know, and it's like, oh, well, all the hard work that I've put into my school to make sure that I can get into a good College in the US is now completely invalidated. And I worked really hard for, like literally nothing and so like making sure that like that just didn't get to me was mainly a priority for me because it's like I’m going to keep working hard regardless of whether we get the green card in time or not. If I don't work hard and I do get the green card, then I've just wasted time and I haven't done anything, so I was doing this to like stay optimistic. Like no, I'm literally going to get it. Like, don't even think like that and like, so that I could keep, like, persevering and keep, like, growing in academics so that I could actually, like, feel confident that, like my hard work is going somewhere.

00:10:20 Speaker 1

How difficult was the process for you?

00:10:22 Speaker 2

I don't really know all the details because my parents mainly handled it, but I did have to go to several appointments like at government offices to like get biometrics done and like answer questions and I know the amount of paperwork my dad had to fill out though was copious and there were a couple days were like I had to be late to school because I was going to like a government office for like a meeting or whatever, like for so long. And then I was like, oh man, I missed, like, half the school day. Now, you know, things like that where it's was a dependent so I didn't have to worry about it too much and my parents were like trying to make sure that like my school life wouldn't be impeded by us having to, like, go to too many meetings. But at the same time, I know the amount of time and effort that my parents had to put in to make sure that, like we had all the things that we needed and all the information was correct so that we could get it. You know, like the proper way on time and correctly.

00:11:15 Speaker 1

Do you think there should be extra support for immigrants, especially those in high school?

00:11:19 Speaker 2

I really do think so, because it would be nice to have more information about the process that I was going through because my family is lucky enough that both my parents have a job and could pay for like a lawyer to, like, help us, you know, navigate the Immigration system, but not all families are lucky. And don't have that resource, so like make sure that you know what they're doing is right and they're not like. Because a lot of times there's like, they ask you for like 30,000 different things when in reality if you just like, you know, dig a little deeper, you find out that there's just one form you need to fill out that will like cover all of that information. And that is like the tediousness of the immigration system is really what makes it so stressful and so difficult because there's so many different like ways you can accidentally go wrong and like, cause a delay of like months or even years in like applications for things. And so giving resources to high school students that are, you know, half generation or second generation immigrants so that their parents can like stay in the US or that they can even stay in the US. like I'm half generation since I was born in India, but I moved to the US as like a young kid, and I've grown up here. I'm still not an American citizen, so like having high school, like a high school resource that I could have gone to, to like help me better understand the process and make sure that like my parents were like understanding in an instance where we weren't fortunate enough to like have a lawyer that would help us like that would be really helpful. I know that a lot of families would benefit from it.

 00:12:54 Speaker 1

Thank you so much for your time.

00:12:54 Speaker 2

Of course. Thank you so much, Chloe.

00:12:56 Speaker 1

The process for immigrants is difficult and there is not much awareness about the subject. There needs to be extra support for students who are immigrants so they can get the grades they need and have less stressful high school experience. We all need to be aware and help in any way we can. Thank you.