



SHAHID HAQUE-HAUSRATH'S SPEECH AT THE RANKIN AWARD RECEPTION

March 6, 2017



Shahid Haque-Hausrath was the 2017 Jeannette Rankin Civil Liberties Award recipient. Below is the speech he gave at the award reception on March 4:

"It's been a privilege to play a role in the lives of over a thousand immigrants and their families here in the State of Montana. It's been my honor to advocate for a group of people who never cease to amaze me with their strength, resilience, generosity, and hard work.

My job has been to help my clients navigate a system that is so exceptionally difficult and complex, just to achieve something so basic: just keeping

families together, helping them live their lives in this state that they chose and love (despite the fact that sometimes their state doesn't seem to love them). Through that work, it's been a unique pleasure to shape, in some small part, the makeup of the State of Montana.

Since I've been doing this for almost a decade, I've gotten to see my clients at all kinds of different stages in their lives. I've often started representing clients when they were facing their worst and most vulnerable moment, when they are facing deportation from their home. You see people who aren't criminals in handcuffs and a jumpsuit, maintaining their dignity as the proud fathers and mothers they are, hoping that they find their way out of this system that has swallowed them up. In those moments, you form a strange bond as your client places their trust in you to guide them through the Kafka-esque absurdity of our immigration court system and hopefully get them out.

On other occasions, I've begun representing clients under much happier circumstances. I've been part wedding planner, getting to know my clients as they start their new lives together as a married couple. I love hearing how my clients met, and what brought them together. That process is no less absurd, as we deal with endless technicalities and paperwork, and look for ways to document and prove the validity of two peoples' love for one another to a government adjudicator.

No matter how our attorney/client relationship begins, I've enjoyed the fact that I've known many of my clients for approaching a decade now. I've seen the relief they feel when they get a piece of plastic we call a green card, which means they get to stay here. Over the years I stay in contact with my clients because even after they get their permanent residence, I help them with citizenship (years down the road), and I've often helped them petition for their parents to join them.

I've started to notice and appreciate the way the cycle of immigration continues, and how much it matters in a state like Montana, where so many people have never gotten to know someone from another country. I've realized that some of the xenophobia we see in Montana is based on a lack of exposure, and that with exposure comes understanding.

I've had many proud and happy moments as an immigration attorney, many of them involve asylum cases for people fleeing from persecution in their home countries, for victims of domestic violence, for families who face exceptional hardships.

But despite my efforts, there have also been far too many people I haven't been able to help, because our immigration laws are so arcane and restrictive, and only provide limited avenues for relief.

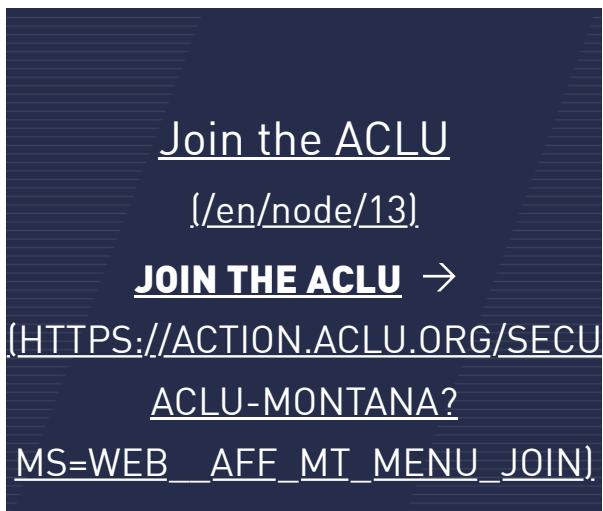
So I'd like to dedicate this award to all the undocumented people who have no path to alleviate their fears and are waiting and biding their time for laws to change, who live their lives here knowing that they stick out and that all it will take is one bad cop or one vindictive neighbor to risk being separated from their families. These people who check in with me every time they hear about a new policy designed to make them even more afraid, even less secure. They have been bearing this burden for far, far too long, but they are doing it with so much more grace than I could ever muster.

I want to dedicate this award to all of them, because it represents my promise to them, to keep fighting for them however I can, and to try and be a voice their concerns when they can't do it themselves.

This year, more than any other year, immigrants in Montana are scared. They are going to need your support, in whatever form you can give it. This year, I invite you to join me in standing up to celebrate and support the

immigrants living in every community throughout our state.

Thank you for his honor."



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