

Migration and Family: A personal story from Lynette Madrigal

Episode 21 Season 3 Relief, Development and Podcast

Soft music through the beginning intro and Scott's intro

LYNETTE: Being deported was always a thing. And my mom would joke about it too, right? She's like, Oh, like, what if I get deported? And like we would be so like, we would have to create like these plans, right? It's like if my mom gets deported, who would take us right? And I think it has to do with the fact that I knew my mom wasn't always going to be present or wasn't always able to be present, and there was a risk for that.

SCOTT: Today we're bringing you a bonus episode of Relief, development and Podcast. As we were researching our last episode on migration, Lynette Madrigal shared her own story, and it was so compelling that we thought it deserved to be it's own episode. Lynette is serving with MCC's Serving And Learning Together or SALT program in Guatemala City. Salt is a program for young adults from Canada or the US who serve alongside MCC partners around the world. Lynette is learning from and sharing her skills with our partner at a migrant shelter called Casa Del Migrante. She grew up in Southern California and was part of a migrant community there. Today, she's serving side-by-side with migrants in Guatemala, and finds that her own story of migration and faith influences her perspective. Lynette will take it from here

LYNETTE: So growing up in Orosi, I always have these like, extremely vivid experiences of like my parents waking us up in the morning and taking us to work in the field with them, you know, we just thought it was like a great time. It's like, oh, my, our parents are here. We're all like picking olives. And then you get a little older and the sun's hot, and you're picking grapes. And that's not fun. And so I think with that also comes the hardships of it, right, it's like, well, then a lot of our parents were also undocumented. And so that was also a shared narrative with a lot of my classmates, a lot of my classmates were undocumented. Growing up in this migrant town really helped me connect deeper to this migrant story that I'm now part of.

My parents being undocumented, coming here, crossing the border, wanting to seek this American dream, just like a lot of my other neighbors in the town. I've had the opportunity to connect deeply with that story. And then I find myself completely disconnected in other ways. I remember being really young, and waking up one morning folding, like doing my bed. And like we all go to the airport. I was about I was in second grade. So I think I was like, seven. And I remember us going packing our bags going to Mexico, which we had done before with my dad because my dad's a resident, he can come in and come out.

And Um we flew in with my mom. And then we just started school there. And I remember that being for a short time. Because, my grandparents got sick, we had to move to Mexico and like, we started a whole new life in Mexico. Like I just remember being at the airport crying because my dad wasn't going to join us and like going with my mom and then seeing my meeting my grandparents for the first time and like experiencing Christmas, Posadas. And just like deep culture, like I went to school, like my mom would send me to go get tortillas and bring them back.

It wasn't something I cried about, like I never cried, like "I miss my life in the US". I think I was too young for that. I just was happy to be with my siblings. And it was so fun to be the squeaky new toy at school, right? There was like speak English speak English, right. And I remember, at some point, having to move back to the US. And my dad picked us up. I remember flying back in and my dad picked us up. But my mom wasn't there. My dad picked us up took us back to my sister's godparent's house. And we stayed there for like three weeks. Without both of our parents.

I didn't know where my dad was. But my dad had actually gone to go pick up my mom who was crossing the border again. And there was some complications along the way. And so it took a long time. But eventually my mom made it back to the US

SCOTT: For Lynette, this experience made real the possibility that her mom, who was undocumented in the U.S., could be deported.

LYNETTE: And so, I think that started so young that I think that started this fear of like, oh, it's actually possible, that I won't that this will happen again. Right? And so that makes me want to cry.

But, um, and so it's just like, I think like having that experience of like, oh, it's actually possible, it was so easy for my dad to come back.

But it wasn't for my mom. And so I think for a long time I, I Like harbor these feelings of like fear. That said, like, oh, like, my mom doesn't belong here. Like it's possible. She can't stay here. Like it's possible she'll be deported back. Like, you know, you hear about deportations like, oh, that my mom's one of those people. Um, so that, you know that that became really hard growing up.

SCOTT: Serving in Guatemala City now. Lynette has witnessed kids for whom this fear is a reality when meeting migrants at the Air Force Base, who have just been deported back to Guatemala”

LYNETTE: I think about these young kids who are crossing borders today.

And who are happy or a lot of them are just frozen or paralyzed with like, what just happened to me, you know, we receive so many deported kids from from the border into Guatemala every day with their parents, right. And a lot of them look like everyday kids at the daycare who are just like crying, either diaper change, or just like, you know, fixated on whatever they're doing. And in my head, I'm like, Wow, I wonder if they know what just happened to them. You know, like, and I think the hardest part is being with these kids and their parents and just seeing their parents just weep. Like, their parents are just, like, broken down. And the kids are the

ones who are trying to wipe their tears off of their eyes. Like that those memories will forever be fixated. In my mind.

Music

I remember seeing this dad who was on the phone. And he was crying. This is a grown man, he was crying with his little son who was under him. And the son was just like looking at his dad's face confused. He was so confused. You could see on his like eyebrows. He was just like, What is he was trying to figure out what his dad's expression and emotion was. Maybe he was empathizing with his dad. And I just see his little hands. He was about like two years old, he his little hands trying to wipe the tears off of his dad's face. And that was the first time I saw that. And since then, you see a lot of the kids do the same thing is like, they don't understand why their parents are crying. But they just you see them wipe the tears off of their parent's face. And it's just like, man, for little kids to be that mature that young, or the you know, how how mature they have to be in that moment, is really powerful.

And so I think. That experience as a young person just has left this big impression on me that it feels like I want to I want to create a safer space for migrants How do I do this? How do I become part of this work?

So feel it all I have to say is I feel like my childhood in in a sense prepared me for work here. It___ it's given me this intrinsic motivation, right? Like it comes from like this, like childhood experience to keep moving forward. And at the same time, I find myself just being a student as well learning alongside of everyone else at the shelter. And so what I do is I get to have these like intimate conversations with them over like a cup of coffee, or as we're playing Connect Four. And so that's where I hear a lot of their pieces of their stories.

When I think about or people usually think about migration, the first person they jump to is like Mexicans, right? Like, Mexico is a big country. It's right south of the border. A lot of borders in the US and people usually just think Mexicans are crossing the border. And then I started realizing it's like, no, actually, people from Nicaragua are crossing the border in large numbers. And people from Honduras and El Salvador, and a lot of Guatemalans every day are risking their lives to cross the border. And so it made me more compassionate into this, like bigger Latino experience that I'm a part of right being Latina, speaking Spanish, I realize it's just like, I, like the work that I'm doing isn't for Mexicans, right? It's not for like a specific people group that I happen to be a part of. It is for all migrants all over all the time. And so that has made me more compassionate I've noticed through through the months, it's just like, I don't only see myself in other Mexicans. Now I see myself in an Honduran person, or a Salvadorian young girl, or this Venezuelan man.

This shelter makes you more compassionate to our people. And that's been such a radical experience to me, right? Because when we think about shelter, we think about babies and young kids and some single moms, but the shelters for everybody, and like what a beautiful description of the kingdom of God, right? It's like, in like a part of your saying, like, no, it shouldn't be for everybody. Some people are entitled to those rights more than other people.

And then you think about what something would be something Jesus would say he's like, No, all people all the time. And so that's been something radical for me to try to just get a hold of, I'm not saying I'm all completely there. I would say from a young age, I always knew the Lord was present. I always knew the Lord is present, that I always know what that looked like or how to best do it. I don't think so. But I remember reaching out to him in my moments, and deeply praying that he would keep my parents safe.

Then loving other people. I remember reading that early on in my evangelical faith, right and being like, yeah, love God love people, like super hipster. Gotta love everybody, right? And then you, it starts seeking deeper, it's like no love of God and love people love neighbors, and you start reading the Old Testament a little bit, and it's like, no, you got to love these foreigners, right? You got to love these poor people, you got to take care of these widows, right

SCOTT: Lynette sometimes finds herself in conversations with people who are critical of migration into the U.S. It's difficult not to get upset in these moments, because the topic is so personal to her.

LYNETTE: I don't know how to go about it all the time. Like, sometimes I just want to like debate and open up the Bible and be like, it says it right here, like, how are you so blind? Like literally, it's like, God says this. and and then you realize, like, oh, that's probably not too effective. Right? That's probably not effective, effective at all.

And so I try to lean in with compassion and stories. I've met with people who care about me who are part of the church, who are just like, you know, what my my My parents migrated here the good way, the right way. Like they started the whole process. It cost them a lot of money, and they did it the right way. And then I tell them, and_ I'm I'm like, Hey, you you realize my mom's undocumented? Right? And then they're just like, caught aback. And I don't say it in a way to offend or put down. But it's just an a way to like, kind of bring some more truth to this issue. Right? It's like Absolutely. Your parent, your parents did this a different way. Can I just tell you about my story? And like my mom's story of why she had to migrate here, right? Or like, can I just tell you about like, my neighbors are stories of why they've had to migrate here. Let's talk about Syria right now, why they're having to migrate or people from Turkey, who are in large numbers and other countries, right?

And so when we think about people who are displaced, I try to think about it in a compassionate way. I would say to people, I'm just like, Well, what did Jesus call us to do? Like, what do we see Jesus actively doing here? What is he saying? Who is he connecting to? Like, do we truly want to be like Jesus? Because I don't think it's easy. And so that's what I kinda lean people towards, like these. These are the people Jesus was with. And then after that, I gently guided them. What did Jesus say? Like Love Your love God with all your heart? Your Mind? Was it that's in the Deuteronomy, but love God, and love people? Where is it in Matthew?

I don't have the Bible memorized, guys. I'm sorry. But I'm love God with all your heart, your soul, your strength, and your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.

And so I think I start with that all the time.

And then I lean into the bigger narrative, bigger story.

Share your story. Listen to their story. And listen to God's story. And so it's just all about stories. Because people people react, and they react differently. And they listen. And we hope that they will, you know, we listen to them, and I listened to them. And I'm like, a hu, that's what you think about immigration. Yeah, like people crossing the border, build borders, politics, and then I'm just like, Hey, can I just share like, Can I share this one picture of like, what I took at the airport? Like, this is what this is what's going on? Like, this is really hard. And can I just share like these people love Jesus. Like they desperately believe Jesus is with them.

I think as I've read the Bible, and as I've been in community with people who get it, who get this, like social action, social justice piece, and then love Jesus, and are committed to loving other people, I think for me, like, has changed the way that I think I see the Bible.

I made a decision early on that I was going to be the person who was okay with sharing my story. Because many of us Latinos are hurt. Many of us Latinos are angry, and I think we're tired, tired of having to like, sit at the table again, and share this and so early on how to make a decision and be like, Okay, do I want to do I do I want to share? Why does it Why should I share it right? Like I'm tired, and then realizing like, no. We connect through stories.

Like we read Scripture, we connect through stories, like I hear other people's stories, and I feel like I understand them a little bit better. We're all part of this greater story, God's story.

SCOTT: That was Lynette Madrigal, an MCC Salt participant who is working with migrants in Guatemala.

This episode of Relief, Development and Podcast was produced on the traditional land of the Anacostia and the Piscataway.

This episode was produced by Christy Kauffman and Linda Espenshade. The Head Producer is Emily Lowen.

Thank you again to Lynette Madrigal for sharing her personal story and the experiences she's had with migrants in Guatemala City.